

HUMMINGBIRDS

For many Oklahomans, a garden is not just a place for growing flowers, but a sanctuary for wildlife. Attracting hummingbirds to your garden can provide hours of enjoyment and also help these vital pollinators thrive. Oklahoma receives visits from several hummingbird species, including the common Ruby-throated, Black-chinned, and the Rufous hummingbird. Here are some ways to create a hummingbird-friendly environment.

While hummingbird feeders are a great way to supplement a bird's diet and provide an energy source during migration, planting native flowers is the most sustainable way to attract hummingbirds. Native plants are better adapted to Oklahoma's climate and soil, require less maintenance, and provide a natural source of nectar and insects. Hummingbirds require a constant and diverse supply of flowers from early spring through late fall.

Here are some recommended native plants that are highly effective at attracting hummingbirds in Oklahoma:

- Coral honeysuckle (*Lonicera sempervirens*): This native vine produces beautiful red or orange tubular flowers from spring to fall.
- Trumpet creeper (*Campsis radicans*): This aggressive vine has showy orange/red flowers and is a hummingbird favorite. It is best planted where it can be managed, such as along a fence.
- Beard tongue (*Penstemon* spp.): This genus includes several species with tubular flowers that are a great nectar source.

- Bee balm (*Monarda* spp.): These plants, with their shaggy, brightly colored flowers, are known for attracting hummingbirds and other pollinators.
- Indian paintbrush (*Castilleja* spp.): With its vibrant red flowers, this plant is a beacon for hummingbirds.

When choosing plants, opt for those with tubular-shaped flowers that are red or pink in color, as these are especially attractive to hummingbirds. Additionally, planting single-flowered blossoms is recommended over double-flowered ones, as they generally produce more nectar.

Feeders can be an excellent tool for attracting hummingbirds, especially during early spring and late fall migration periods. The Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation recommends placing feeders out by early April to greet arriving hummingbirds and leaving them up until at least November 1 to provide for late-season migrants.

To prepare the nectar, use a simple solution of one part granulated white sugar to four parts boiled water. Always allow the solution to cool before filling the feeder. Never use honey or sugar substitutes, as these can harm the birds. Red dye is also unnecessary and potentially harmful; the red color of the feeder itself is sufficient to attract them.

Feeder hygiene is crucial to prevent the spread of bacteria and fungi. Clean feeders every three to four days in warm weather and at least once a week during cooler periods. Use a solution of hot water and vinegar for cleaning. If you notice one hummingbird aggressively defending a feeder, consider placing additional feeders out of sight from one another to reduce territorial disputes.

By combining native plant landscaping with well-maintained feeders, you can create a welcoming and beneficial haven for hummingbirds in your garden.

SOURCES:

<https://extension.okstate.edu/fact-sheets/landscaping-and-gardening-for-birds.html>

<https://extension.okstate.edu/fact-sheets/drought-tolerant-plant-selections-for-oklahoma.html>