

Hummingbirds In The Garden

Hummingbirds are the tiny jewels of the summer garden. These iridescent flying marvels, flitting from flower to flower, seem to defy gravity, flying up and down and often hovering in mid-air. It is fun to watch children become very still and under their breath whisper to each other, "Hummingbird!" at the first sight of this exquisite bird.

The two species that can be found near us are the Ruby-Throated Hummingbird and the Black-Chinned Hummingbird. While they are found in far Western Oklahoma, they will frequent feeders elsewhere in the state, including our area, during fall migration. Rufous Hummingbirds are an occasional fall migrant throughout the state and Broad-Tailed Hummingbirds are rare visitors to our state. Hummingbirds that migrate through our area travel over 1,000 miles from Mexico, flying over the Gulf of Mexico, fueling their flight with accumulated body fat. Once they have reached their destination in the United States, they must feed every fifteen minutes in order to survive. Hummingbirds are unique in their feeding habits and, unlike most birds, live off nectar from blossoms and small insects that have been trapped in the sticky nectar. They drink the nectar using their long tongue which flicks up nectar at a rate of about 13 licks per second.

Many gardeners will plant flowers which attract these amazing birds. In order to feel at home in your garden, Hummingbirds like trumpet shaped, nectar rich flowers, water, shade, and security. They are attracted to bright flowers and especially seem to be drawn to red flowers. Flowers that have particular appeal to Hummingbirds include: Trumpet Vine, Trumpet Honeysuckle, Beebalm, Daylily, Sage, Red Cardinal Flower, Columbine, Garden Phlox, Fuchsia, Salvia, Verbena, Cuphea (Cigar Flower) and Lupine to name a few.

Many people also choose to hang nectar feeders. If you choose to use a Hummingbird feeder, make sure the feeder is hung close to flowers that would attract Hummingbirds anyway. Nectar can be easily made with 4 parts warm/hot water to 1 part table sugar. The feeder should be hung in a shaded place to make sure the nectar doesn't go bad in the sun and heat. Make sure to place the feeder somewhere you can see the hummingbirds easily. Finally, a birdbath or bubbler to provide a place to dip for a quick bath and a few trees or shrubs for shade and shelter and your backyard can become a Hummingbird haven!