# Hummingbird Gardening in the Western U.S.

**While many people use feeders to attract hummingbirds, gardening for hummingbirds also brings beauty and understanding of the natural world.**

Attracting hummingbirds to your yard with flowering plants is a very entertaining gardening activity. Children in particular, delight in seeing these winged jewels darting from flower to flower in search of their next sip of nectar. While many non-gardeners use hummingbird feeders as nectar sources, planting colorful flowers, shrubs and vines brings added beauty to the landscape and an appreciation and understanding of how the natural world is interconnected.

Making your yard a magnet for hummingbirds is easy if you provide the three basics; water, shelter and food. Hummingbirds prefer water sources that drip or spray. A fountain with multiple tiers that drip or a very low volume mist nozzle attached to a branch or tree trunk are ideal. Remember to locate the mist nozzle or fountain in the open, situated away from hiding spots where cats can hide and ambush the birds. Conifers, shade trees and taller shrubs, especially when placed off to the sides and back of open spaces in the garden, will provide a sheltered perch where the hummingbirds can rest, build nests and safely survey their garden domain. Placing small handfulls of clothes drier lint in the branches will provide material for the “hummers” to build their nests.

Hummingbird feeders require regular maintenance several times per week to keep the sugar water fresh and the feeders clean. A well planned flower garden on the other hand will provide a low maintenance source for both nectar and insects. It is a little known fact that hummingbirds eat large quantities of small insects such as aphids and whiteflies as an essential part of their diet. When planning your hummingbird garden, plant choices will depend both on the climate in your region and the time of the year the hummingbirds are most plentiful. In northern New Mexico, the hummingbirds we see are migratory. Although, it is not uncommon to have a few nesting pairs spend the summer here, most hummingbirds appear for a few weeks in the spring as they fly north to their summer nesting grounds. They re-appear in our region for a much longer visit in late summer as they move gradually south to their wintering grounds in Mexico. Many flowering perennials thrive in our western climate and are favored by hummingbirds.

For late spring and early summer color, Rosemary “Arp” (Rosmarinus), the Beardtongues (Penstemon eatoni, P. pinifolius “Compactum” and others), the Columbines (Aquilegia), and the Coralbells (Heuchera) are recommended. To attract hummingbirds from mid-summer through the fall, Scarlet Hedgenettle (Stachys coccinea), Texas Red Yucca (Hesperaloe), Redbirds in a Tree (Scrophularia), the Hummingbird Mints (Agastache), the Beebalms (Monarda), the Sages (Salvia greggii and S. greggii hybrids), and Hummingbird Trumpet (Zauschneria) are essential. The presence of these later bloomers will insure an abundance of hummingbirds at the height of their southward migration.

To fill in the back of the perennial border, the easy to grow Butterfly Bush (Buddleia) is unsurpassed. This late summer blooming shrub comes in a range of colors including burgundy (“Royal Red”), pink (“Pink Delight”), purple (“Black Knight”), and lavender (“Dartmoor”). Also valued for covering fences and trellises, are several woody vines. Trumpet Vine (Campsis) is a vigorous plant, useful for covering large expanses of fence or wall. It has large trumpet-shaped flowers in yellow and various shades of orange. The scarlet or orange flowered honeysuckles (Lonicera) offer the gardener a more refined, smaller growing choice for small fences and trellises.

Gardening to attract hummingbirds is easy to do. By providing water, shelter and an assortment of colorful flowering plants, you will be rewarded with the company of these wonderful wildbirds. You will also help insure their future by replacing food plants and habitat lost to human activities like agriculture and urbanization.

For more information about hummingbirds and hummingbird supplies, contact

The Hummingbird Society  
249 East Main St., Suite 4

Newark DE 19711  
(800) 529-3699)  
www.hummingbird.org

This organization is dedicated to the study and conservation of hummingbirds. Hummingbird expert Dan True has designed an excellent no maintenance hummingbird house. It is attached to the eave of your house to allow you to see the nesting process up close. Contact him at

Hummingbird House  
1332 Stratford  
Clovis, NM 88101