

## Tips on Attracting Hummingbirds

Perhaps it's their extremely small stature, or the blur of their lightning-fast wings. Whatever the reason, hummingbirds have gained a reputation as an elusive, mysterious member of the bird family. Spottings of the diminutive feathered species are often met with surprise and excitement, almost as if the birdwatcher has received a rare and unexpected gift.

While the hummingbird can indeed be regarded as a gift—from nature, that is—the “rare” part isn't quite accurate. In prime season, and with the right tools and techniques, it's quite possible to attract dozens of various species into your own backyard. Follow these tips to turn your garden into a haven for hummingbirds.

**Cater to their hunger.** Hummingbirds have an extremely speedy metabolism, eating at least once every 10 minutes. This voracious appetite provides birdwatchers with the perfect opportunity to lure them in. One of the best ways to attract hummingbirds into your yard is to hang a birdfeeder filled with their favorite food.

**Satisfy their sweet tooth.** For an appetizer, hummingbirds prefer nectar, which serves as a source of the fuel they need to seek out the soft-bodied bugs they'll later ingest for protein and vitamins. The birds get most of their nectar by nosing around in flowers, but if they get lucky enough to come across a hummingbird feeder, they don't need to work as hard. To attract hummingbirds to your feeder—and to ensure many happy returns—fill it with properly blended nectar. You can either buy nectar mixture pre-made from a bird supply store, or make it yourself by combining 1 part sugar and 4 parts water, then boiling for 1-2 minutes and cooling it in the refrigerator.

**Get in the red.** Hummingbirds have virtually no sense of smell, so they rely heavily on their sight to track potential sources of food. They're especially partial to bright red, so keep that in mind when choosing a feeder. If you already have a feeder that's lacking in red, try festooning it with some red artificial flowers or red ribbon.

**Create a hummingbird garden.** There are certain trees, plants, shrubs, and flowers to which hummingbirds are naturally drawn. Determine which of those can be successfully cultivated in your area and climate, and then plant them in your yard to create a brightly inviting hummingbird haven. Position one or more feeders among your custom garden, then sit back and enjoy the show. The hummingbirds will likely visit the blooms first, as they always prefer the real thing if given the choice. Later, after they've exhausted the flowers' nectar, they'll drift over to discover your feeders.

**Be a crowd pleaser.** To attract more than one hummingbird, consider placing multiple feeders in your yard. By nature, hummingbirds are very territorial and prefer to have their own dedicated food source. If you hang only one feeder, you'll likely find that just one loyal patron—probably an adult male—will consume all of your nectar, reverently patrolling his newfound booty and chasing other would-be hummingbird visitors away. Put as much distance between each feeder as possible to keep competition to a minimum.

**Get your schedules in synch.** Be sure to time the hanging of your feeders with the arrival of the hummingbirds in your area. Migratory patterns vary widely by geographical location.

**Keep it chemical-free.** Refrain from using pesticides in close proximity to the plants and flowers that attract hummingbirds. Not only does this kill the very insects that serve as protein-rich sustenance for hummingbirds, it also puts the birds at risk of ingesting the poison themselves, which can cause sickness or even death.

**Create landing zones.** If your lawn is short on branches, shrubbery, or other convenient perching opportunities, consider stringing a clothesline or piece of fishing wire near your birdfeeders or plants. When hummingbirds aren't eating or flying, they spend a great deal of time sitting and resting. If they can't find an appealing place to land, they may continue on to a different garden.

After just a week or two of following some or all of these tips for attracting hummingbirds, you'll likely begin to notice a steady string of air traffic. Grab a cold drink, kick up your feet, and enjoy this exquisite gift from nature.