

The Hummingbirds are Back

Distribute 03-02-2017

There have been a number of reports from area gardeners that they have observed black-chinned hummingbirds at sugar water feeders and at nectar producing plants. Black-chinned hummingbirds are the species that nest in the San Antonio area. We also see rufous and ruby throated hummingbirds during the fall migration.

This time of the year hummingbirds will be collecting nectar from crossvine, *Salvia greggii*, Texas gold columbine, redbud, larkspur, rain lilies, oxalis, paperwhites and other blooms. For early summer, zinnias, lantana, the blue salvias, Turk's cap, shrimp plant and pentas are good sources of nectar. For late summer add firebush, esperanza, coral vine vitex, and poinciana. In the fall cape honeysuckle and firespike are popular additions. Oxalis, Turks cap, shrimp plant, redbud, penta, and firespike do well in the shade.

In addition to including nectar plants in your landscape all season long, providing sugar water in a feeder will bring the hummingbirds in to allow close observation.

Hummingbird feeders are available from many sources and in many designs. Your favorite retail nursery probably carries them as do pet supply stores and supermarkets. One of the best places to find functional hummingbird feeders are the wild bird specialty stores.

The feeders can be artistic or plain but it is important that they are easy to refill and easy to clean. I like feeders with a quart size reservoir of glass or clear plastic that can easily be detached from its base for rinsing and refilling weekly. They should be cleaned with a bottle brush every month. Best 1 Feeder meets my requirements and is manufactured in Poteet for those looking to support local manufacturers.

There are special formulated feeder mixes or you can just use sugar dissolved in water. Use 4 parts water by volume for 1 part sugar. It works well to mix the sugar water a gallon at a time and store it in a gallon jug in the refrigerator. Red food coloring has traditionally been used to make the sugar water more attractive to the birds but it is not necessary. Most feeders are red and the hummingbirds don't seem to have trouble finding and using the feeder even if the sugar water is clear.

Hang the feeders under the eaves or on the arbor. They can also be placed in the flower bed on metal stakes manufactured for the use. The important thing is to place the feeders where they can be observed from the kitchen window, patio chairs or other places you spend time.

Sugar water is also attractive to butterflies, honeybees, woodpeckers, house finches, and fire ants. Some feeders include bee guards but the fire ants are really the only unwelcome "visitors" to my feeders. There are ant interceptors in the form of cups to hold liquids to block their passage down the feeder hanging wire. If you use such a mechanism use cooking oil as the liquid. Water evaporates in about 2 hours in a San Antonio summer. I just move my feeders around. It usually takes the ants several days to find them at their new location.

For a second popular nesting bird, the purple martins are back in town. I have not seen. It is time to put back up your martin houses. If you act quickly you have time to put up a new house.