

Attracting Hummingbirds

Distribute 03-08-2018

It is time for the hummingbirds to return to San Antonio. Some of the black-chinned hummingbirds that migrate through will stay to nest in our yards. The others, along with migrating ruby-throats and the few rufous hummingbirds that stayed here all winter will move on to the north and east in the case of the ruby-throats and west for the rufous hummingbirds.

If you have cross-vine or columbine, they are often the first place where you notice the migrating hummingbirds in the spring. Other nectar-producing plants include *Salvia greggii*, larkspur, sweet peas, snapdragons, and stocks. The resident black-chinned hummingbirds later rely on the summer salvias, lantanas, trumpet creeper, esperanza, firebush, pentas, Mexican honeysuckle, cape honeysuckle and other tubular flowers. If you plant zinnias, milkweed, and porter weed for the butterflies, you can also count on them to be favorite hummingbird feeding sites.

In addition to providing nectar producing blooms, one of the easiest ways to bring hummingbirds in for close observation is to provide sugar water in a hummingbird feeder. The feeders can be works of art or simply provide a reservoir and dispensers suitable to allow the hummingbird to suck the sugar water from the reservoir.

The main requirement is that they be easy to clean and refill every week or more often. Two brands that I rely on are Perky Pet and Best 1. Best 1 is manufactured in Poteet. Perky Pet has a clear plastic reservoir with red base. Best 1 has a glass reservoir. The feeders can be purchased at HEB, your favorite nursery, pet supply stores or bird specialty retailers such as Wild Birds Unlimited.

Mix 1-part sugar with 5 parts water by volume. The sugar water can be mixed in volume and stored in the refrigerator. As far as I can tell there are no research results supporting the claim that the food coloring is a danger to the birds, but it is not necessary. The hummingbirds will find the sugar water whether it is clear or red colored.

Hang your hummingbird feeder on the eaves or a trellis. It should be in a position where it is easy for you to observe the birds feeding and easy for you to remove the feeder to rinse it and refill. Place the old sugar water in a shallow dish for the butterflies. They never find old sugar water to be stale!

The hummingbird feeder will attract other wildlife in addition to hummingbirds. I welcome the golden-fronted woodpeckers, house finches, butterflies and honeybees. They all will take a portion of the sugar water but don't usually keep the hummingbirds away from the feeder for long. Fire ants can be a problem. There are moat-like structures that can be put on the feeder hanging wire to keep them off for a while. Use cooking oil instead of water to fill the moat, it doesn't evaporate as quickly. Another tactic is to move the feeder among several locations to help keep the fire ants from settling in too easily.

Expect the action at the feeder to be reduced during the nesting season because the breeding adult hummingbirds are territorial. Once the young hatch and leave the nest, the numbers will increase at the feeder.

Landscape Design School

If you want to make improvements to your landscape, participate in the GVST Landscape Design School co-sponsored by SAWS and the Trinity Glen Rose Water Conservation District on March 24 from 8:30 AM to 1:30 PM at the Coker United Methodist Church on Wurzbach Parkway W of Hwy 281. The School includes lectures, resource handouts and individual consultations. The fee is \$30 per person or \$50 for 2 from the same household. To reserve a seat or obtain more information, call 210 251 8101 or go to info@gardeningvolunteers.com.