

## Hummingbirds

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It was hot and dry enough this summer in San Antonio to require us to go into Stage 1 Water Restrictions but the weather conditions were not severe enough to reduce our enjoyment of the new generation of black-chinned hummingbirds that were produced. The young joined the adult birds after they left the nest to take advantage of available sugar water feeders and blooms. If you offered bird baths or other water sources, you probably also saw the birds utilize the water.

Several San Antonio gardeners reported incidents where the young hummingbirds and their now relaxed parents landed on feeders that were being rinsed, moved, and refilled with sugar water. It was not clear if the birds were being bossy and trying to hurry their feeder maintainer, or they were just being friendly and encouraging their gardeners.

As interesting as the period after the hummingbird young of the year leave the nest is, the fall migration period is even more exciting. In addition to black-chinned hummingbirds, waves of ruby-throated, and rufous hummingbirds also move through the San Antonio area during the fall migration period. The general movement is from north to south, but groups also move from west to east and east to west. The migrants are competitive and some of the most entertaining action are the dogfights for a roost on the hummingbird feeder.

The rufous hummingbirds are the smallest species in the mix, but they also seem to be the most aggressive. Another unusual behavior by the rufous hummingbirds is the inclination of some birds every year to linger here in San Antonio for the winter. Our neighborhood in the Medical Center area is usually blessed with a winter resident rufous hummingbird.

To meet the fall migrants' needs for nectar provide at least one sugar water feeder offering a mix of 4 parts water and one-part sugar by volume. The sugar water mix does not need to be dyed with food coloring. It is easiest to pre- mix the solution in gallon jugs and store it in the refrigerator for the refill every week.

Hang the feeders on the eaves. There are lots of choices for feeders. Some qualify as art objects, but the best feeders are those that are easy to clean, refill and have good bee guards. My favorite is the BEST 1 Feeder manufactured in Poteet. Perky Pet and Duncraft are also attractive and easy to use. They are available at area nurseries, Wild Birds Unlimited, and HEB.

In addition to bees, your feeders will probably attract golden- fronted woodpeckers. The bees are important pollinators so need to be tolerated. One way to meet the needs of the bees is to pour the remnants of your weekly sugar water in a shallow plate for them to consume. The woodpeckers can be destructive if they pull out the bee guards, that is one of the reasons, I like the BEST1 Feeder, the woodpeckers can not remove the bee guard.

Of course, In addition to the sugar water feeders, it is fun to include special nectar plants on or near the patio for the migrating hummingbirds. A few duranta and cape honeysuckles in the landscape near the patio will bring them in. Use fire bush or porterweed in full sun in a 5-gallon container. In the shade

offer penta and or firespike. It will not take long to identify the dominant hummingbirds of the current wave, but half the fun is watching the changes as the season progresses.