

Hummingbird Garden Tips

Hummingbirds are everywhere in this region. Anna's hummingbirds live here year-round and we welcome Allen's and rufous hummers during their spring migration. Once hummingbirds discover your garden, they are likely to return each year at about the same time, depending upon the availability of food, water, nesting sites, and perches.

- Hummingbird gardens don't have to be large—even a flower box or trellis will do. One approach is to think vertically when planning your hummingbird garden. Use trellises, trees, garden sheds, or other structures to support climbing vines.
- Plant the plants which will attract and feed the hummingbirds. Learn which plants hummingbirds feed on in natural areas near your home. Native plants are ideal, but so are some of the great Australian plants found at the UCSC Arboretum! Do not plant Japanese and tartarian honeysuckles which are terribly invasive.
- Choose red, tubular flowers, as these are quick clues to a flower's value as a hummingbird food supply. Hummingbirds are also attracted to orange and pink flowers, but they find yellow and white blooms less attractive. Red, non-tubular flowers such as roses and geraniums may lure hummingbirds with the color or their blooms, but they offer little nectar, so the birds quickly reject them. Flowers that rely on sweet scents to attract insect pollinators usually do not provide a nectar source for hummingbirds.
- Plant several of the same species to provide larger quantities of nectar. Prune your plants to prevent excessive woody growth and instead favor production of flowers. Select plants that bloom at different times of the year to provide nectar throughout the hummingbird season.
- Provide water baths. Like most birds, hummingbirds frequently bathe in shallow water—even in the drops that collect on leaves. Hummingbirds may sit and fluff and preen or flit through the droplets generated by garden misters, drip fountain devices, and small waterfalls.
- Hummingbirds need to sit still for a moment to digest their food. If there are no trees or shrubs nearby, position perches within 10 to 20 feet of the garden. As a substitute for a live perch, use a dead branch with small twigs.
- Be persistent. Hummingbirds may appear minutes after you set out inviting plants, but sometimes it takes several weeks before they happen upon your garden. Even with luscious red flowers as bait, pure chance may keep your feeder a secret until the first migrant discovers it. Once hummingbirds do start visiting your garden, they are likely to continue throughout the season and will usually return the following year. If visits drop off for a week or two in midsummer, the reason may be that an especially attractive nearby flower patch may have temporarily diverted your hummingbirds.
- Avoid insecticides and herbicides. Hummingbirds can ingest poisons when they eat insects; systemic herbicides can also be found in flower nectar.