
Create a Hummingbird haven



It's easy to imagine the word "flitter" was coined while the word's creator was observing a hummingbird. Hours can melt away watching these super compact marvels of biological engineering carry on their busy lives. They hover, dive, and fly backwards, sipping nectar from flowers and aggressively—amusingly so due to their small size—driving off competing hummingbirds. The namesake hum of their wings and the sun glinting off their iridescent feathers are a joy to eyes and ears, one that can be enjoyed regularly if a flower garden is planned with their comfort in mind. Here are some tips to bring hummingbirds calling.

1. **Color and shape.** Hummingbirds are drawn to the color red and trumpet-shaped flowers. "If you can find a plant that bears a trumpet-shaped, red flower it will be a hummingbird magnet," says David Trinklein, University of Missouri extension horticulturist. He explains their long bills are specially adapted to reach deep into the elongated flowers where other nectar feeders can't reach, helping to reduce competition for food.

"Fragrance doesn't seem to be too important to a hummingbird. Even non-fragrant flowers, especially if they're in the shape of a trumpet and reddish in color, will attract hummingbirds," Trinklein says.

Red, pink, and purple varieties of monarda—a member of the mint family, also known as beebalm—are very attractive to hummingbirds, as are foxglove and columbine. Mandevilla [rock trumpet], a relatively new flower on the horticultural scene is another great addition for the regions where it will grow. "It's a heat-loving tropical vine that produces pinkish red trumpet-shaped flowers about 3 inches across making it very attractive to hummingbirds. It can grow as a perennial in warmer zones, but is treated as an annual here in Missouri," Trinklein says.

While the right flower will attract hummingbirds, it's not a bad idea to also put out a few hummingbird feeders to help keep these overactive marvels well fed. "They're so tiny and delicate in nature, and their hearts can beat 1,200 times per minute, that's 20 times per second! They have to feed about every 15 minutes to meet their energy needs," Trinklein says.

This endless drive for food is why they mostly squabble with other hummingbirds protecting their territory and food supply, ignoring humans almost all together. This makes it easy to watch their delightful aerobatics up close. Their nature also makes them one of the few birds that can be photographed without a massive and expensive telephoto lens—but expect to be patient and quick with the shutter release. They may stay in one general area for long-term observation, but their movements are lightning fast.

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2. **Add amenities.** With wings beating incessantly more beelike than bird, and their little hearts pounding at incredible rates, it's a great comfort to hummingbirds to have a little shade available near where they feed. "Hummingbirds tend to perch between feedings. They can get very hot, so having some shade nearby is attractive to them," Trinklein says. Most flowers will need full sun for best growth. But having shade nearby or positioning the flower garden so shade will move over the flowering plants in the afternoon will create a welcome oasis for the birds.

Water should also be provided. "Hummingbirds probably won't visit regular birdbaths often because the water is too deep for them. Instead, either install a very shallow birdbath or a birdbath with a bubbler on it so there's splashing water and a bit of mist or droplets created for the hummingbirds," he says.

3. **Keep it open.** If attracting hummingbirds is the goal, Trinklein advises designing flower gardens so they're sweeping and open. "You don't want pockets of flowers here and pockets of flowers there, you want large freeform beds with curving lines as opposed to blocky beds," he says. "This design will attract them to come and search for food."
4. **Continuous bloom.** Hummingbirds not only need to feed every 15 minutes, they need to feed all season long. Planting a variety of flowers so there are desirable blooms present from spring through fall will keep hummingbirds from moving on to greener—or redder in their case—pastures.

"Make sure you plant a variety of species that bloom in early spring, summer, and fall. You can also keep them happy with supplemental feeders. In the case of hummingbirds, the flowers are as much for the enjoyment of the gardener as they are for feeding the hummingbirds. You can attract them with the flowers and keep them fed with feeders," Trinklein says. For tips on keeping a garden in constant bloom, visit this article to achieve a [Continuous Cascade of Color](#).

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