



The Plant Professionals

Hummingbird Plants for South Texas

Few creatures excite the imagination like the tiny, iridescent hummingbird. (Native Americans called them the sunbeam bird). Introducing appropriate plants, particularly natives, into the home landscape will provide the birds with food and shelter. Using native plant materials frequently dramatically reduces the gardener's water and maintenance requirements as well.

During spring and fall migration (mid-to-late August through September), the Coastal Bend becomes a natural staging area for thousands of Ruby-throated and in lesser numbers, Black-chinned, Rufous and Buff-bellied Hummingbirds. The birds remain here a few weeks to rest and refuel (sometimes gaining up to 1/2 ounce!) in preparation for a Gulf crossing or some elect to circumvent the water. Theirs is an amazing journey from points far north, to their tropical wintering grounds.

Hummingbirds feed only at very specific flower: almost exclusively red tube-like or trumpet-shaped blooms. Note that although the birds' decided preference for red does attract them to hibiscus and bougainvillea plants, neither provides a suitable energy source. Ornithologists suggest that if migrating birds expend crucial energy investigating essentially nectarless flower (they must feed constantly- 15 to 20 minutes until they build up sufficient reserves), they can actually starve to death.

- o TURK'S CAP (*Malvaviscus drummondii*), Red Mallow
- o MEXICAN TURK'S CAP (*Malvaviscus arboreus*).
- o SCARLET SAGE (*Salvia coccinea*)
- o AUTUMN SAGE (*Salvia greggii*)
- o CAPE HONEYSUCKLE (*Tecomaria capensis*)
- o CORAL HONEYSUCKLE (*Lonicera sempervirens*)
- o DESERT WILLOW (*Chilopsis linearis*)
- o HUMMINGBIRD BUSH (*Anisacanthus wrightii*)
- o RED PENTAS (*Pentas lanceolata*)
- o MEXICAN FIRECRACKER BUSH (*Russelia equisetiformis*)
- o HUMMINGBIRD PLANT (*Jacobinia carnea*) Brazilian Plume Flower, Red Justicia
- o SHRIMP PLANT
- o TRUMPET VINE (*Campsis*) Trumpet Creeper
- o JATROPHA (*Integerrima*)
- o BOTTLEBRUSH (*Callistemon*)
- o HAMELIA Mexican Firebush, Hummingbird Bush
- o FOUR-O'CLOCK (*Mirabilis jalapa*)
- o LANTANA (*Lantana horrida*)
- o CORALBEAN (*Erythrina herbacea*)
- o Plant list recommended by the Coastal Bend Audubon Society and the Corpus Christi Botanical Society.

A WELCOME TREAT FOR HUNGRY HUMMERS

As the hummers' habitat shrinks, supplement feeding becomes increasingly important. The energy requirements of a hummingbird's tiny body (the bird kingdom's smallest-their brains are proportionately the largest) are astounding. Their survival depends on consuming 50% of their body weight in sucrose (table sugar) every day!

An inexpensive feeder and a batch of syrup is a simple matter. But a hummingbird bash in your own backyard as our spring and fall migrations (mid-August to late September) get into full gear can be an extravagant event!

NECTAR SHOULD BE CHANGED EVERY 2-3 DAYS IN THE HEAT OF SUMMER. Better to be drained dry than spoil. Serve only as much as your birds consume in a few

day's time. If you're not willing to commit to keeping the syrup fresh, plant tubular red flowers in the yard instead.

Wash feeders scrupulously. Rinse in a weak vinegar or Clorox solution to kill mildew spores and rinse again very thoroughly before filling.

EASY HUMMINGBIRD NECTAR

Bring one cup sugar and four cups water to boil. (A glass jar in your microwave makes short work of it). Cool. Use as needed. Refrigerate unused portion. (Sterilization retards mildew growth and fermentation which can sicken birds). NOTE: Ornithologists frown on commercial vitamin and protein additives. Never use artificial sweeteners or honey. Either can be fatal to the birds. Red food dye is controversial. Don't bother. Red markings on the feeder will draw the birds in.