

Plant and They Will Come!

Hummingbirds – the Crowning Glory of Your Garden



There is only one sight lovelier than a hummingbird sipping nectar from a feeder—the beauty of a hummingbird feeding from a natural bloom in your garden. Not all gardeners are bird watchers; however, when one of these tiny creatures visits the garden, it is hard to resist pausing from garden chores long enough to admire this summer guest as it moves from bloom to bloom, sampling flower nectar, or dining on miniscule insects.

Except for the occasional rarity, the Ruby-throated Hummingbird is the only species found in the northeast. Weighing only 1/8th of an ounce and measuring about 3 ½ inches, this bird is a triumph of flight engineering! With a heart rate of 1200 beats per minute, and wing beats averaging 50 per second when feeding, it is easy to see why these little creatures need to feed often. Lucky for us that they do – it is a pleasure to observe them as they make frequent trips to nectar sources, whether natural or artificial. Ruby-throats are very inquisitive, adapting quickly to human presence, so enticing them to visit your garden is not difficult.

There are many plants which will grow well in our area that are beneficial to hummingbirds. The following is a sampling of native perennials that will enhance your garden and attract hummingbirds:

- Wild Bergamot or Bee Balm - *Monarda fistulosa* is a plant Ruby-throats love so much it is sometimes referred to as the “hummingbird flower!” This plant is native to New York and is a member of the mint family and will bring both butterflies and bees to your garden as well.
- Eastern Red Columbine is delicate looking, but very hardy. *Aquilegia canadensis*, is a lovely red and yellow wildflower found in our rocky woods and along country roads. It is a reliable hummingbird magnet, because it blooms during May, June, and July when hummingbirds return to our area and are breeding and feeding young, and therefore most in need of a special diet. This plant will add interest to perennial beds and borders along watergardens, and if there is enough ambient light, it can grow well in a shade garden.
- Cardinal Flower, *Lobelia cardinalis*, is a member of the Bellflower family that will provide nectar from late July to September when many others have finished their bloom cycle. The brilliant red 2-3’ flower spikes are irresistible to hummingbirds. This plant will thrive in a moist soil and does not like hot afternoon sun.
- Fringed Bleeding Heart, *Dicentra eximia*, forms an attractive clump of gray-green foliage with rose-pink heart shaped flowers. This will be a valuable addition to your garden as well as a target for hummingbirds since it has a long bloom time if spent flowers are removed promptly.

- Canada Lily, *Lilium canadense*, is a spectacular lily that thrives in a slightly acid or neutral soil in wet meadows. It can easily adapt to your garden. Flowers are borne in mid-summer on stalks that reach 4-6 feet tall, and are usually yellow, but may be red or orange.

In addition, there are many annuals that will attract hummingbirds to your garden; a few choices are: Salvia, Nasturtium, Impatiens, Snapdragon, Lantana, Phlox and Verbena. Potting a few and placing them on your deck or in window boxes will attract hummingbirds to your property and add enjoyment to your summer hours.

If you add a few of these plants to your property, you'll be rewarded with the jewel-like flash and the loud buzzing of the hummingbird's wings as you work in your garden this summer.



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