



# NEWSPAPER ARTICLES

## Hummingbirds in Your Garden (September, Lifestyle Magazine)

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Hummingbirds have always fascinated people, and many enjoy trying to attract them. These busy, intelligent, curious and territorial little creatures are generally tolerant of humans and willingly come to places humans design to attract them. They are found only in the western hemisphere and travel from South to North America and back again. The largest migration is in early spring and late fall. However, if you create an attractive place for them, many will stop and remain with you – even for the winter, if you plan it right. Those who move on will remember where they have been and return to specific flowerbeds, nests and feeders.

There are many species, but in Tulare and Kings County we primarily have Annas whose males have red heads and red gorgets (the collar area), and green backs; the feisty Rufous with orange-red coloring, and Black Chins who sport a black gorget, deep purple collars and dark heads. You may occasionally see a Costa with its purple crown and gorget, an Allen with a green back and orange elsewhere (hard to differentiate from a Rufous), or rarely a Calliope that is green on top, white underneath with a purple and white striped gorget.



Hummingbirds must consume the equivalent nectar of 1000-1500 flowers per day and they eat many insects. With their long bill and a tongue longer than the bill, hummers lap the nectar from the tubular flowers much like a cat laps water, and they carry the pollen from flower to flower on their forehead as well as their beak.

Try not to use chemicals to deal with insects in your garden, instead let hummingbirds and other natural predators take care of them. These birds also need spider webs to help hold their nests together. Hummingbird nests are hard to find because they are so small (about the size of half a golf ball); they can be located in trees (especially oaks and conifers), shrubs and eaves. Water is important too and should be shallow or in a spray. You can see them bathing and drinking from wet leaves and flying through your sprinklers.

If you provide feeders for your hummers, be sure you have at least two placed far enough apart to prevent one bird from dominating a feeder so that others cannot feed. The syrup should be 1/3 – 1/4 cup granulated sugar to one cup of boiled water. Do not use red dye. It is not good for the birds and is unnecessary to attract the birds. Also, stay away from using honey as it can be fatal for them. Change the syrup every two to three days and clean the feeders with hot water and a bottle brush.

To keep hummingbirds around, plant flowers, trees and shrubs that they prefer. If you have flowers that bloom in different seasons you will see them going from flowers to feeders and back again. Often one hummingbird will protect a flowerbed for itself, so it is helpful to provide bird friendly plants in different areas of your yard and include trees for safe perching from cats. Deadheading flowers frequently will keep them blooming for longer periods of time.

Although hummingbirds seem to be mostly attracted to red blooms, they will take nectar from flowers of all colors. Red blooms that initially attract them in our zones (8-9) can be salvias, "Lucifer" crocosmias, trumpet vines, California fuchsias, trumpet vines, coral bells, bottle brush shrubs and trees, chuparosa (justica), shrimp

plants, cardinal flowers (lobelia), monkey flowers, red hot poker or torch lilies, star clusters (pentas) and day lilies. Hummingbirds are the primary pollinators for at least 150 North American flowers.

Other hummingbird friendly plants that grow in Tulare and Kings County include butterfly bushes, citrus trees, desert willows, lantana, rose of Sharon, and Mexican sage. Annual and perennial flowers like Peruvian lilies (alstromeria), penstemon, cannas, foxglove, gladiolus, impatiens, delphinium, Lily of the Nile (agapanthas), phlox, and honeysuckle vines are also hummingbird favorites. Many of these plants are native and also drought tolerant, and September and October is the perfect time of year to plant these perennials.

Hummingbirds like so many different kinds of trees, shrubs and flowers; you can have a garden that is pleasing to both you and hummingbirds. With feeders and flowers you can enjoy these marvelous creatures with hours of watching pleasure.

