

Hummingbirds

Hummingbirds are so much fun to watch as they dart and hover in the garden. The ruby-throated is by far the most prevalent hummingbird in the Dallas area. The iridescent red throat is only on the male; the female and juveniles have white throats. They are very territorial and a male will not let another male share the flowers and feeder that he can see. You can have more flowers and feeders on the opposite side of the house and attract another family.

Ruby-throats migrate to Central America during the winter and return to the place they were hatched. The males lead the way in both directions by about three weeks. They arrive in the Dallas area as early as mid-March and stay until September. They are most prevalent in July and August.

Flowers attract hummers to your yard and feeders can bring them up closer to a window so you can see them better. The best feeders are in the red color range and do not have yellow flowers because this attracts bees to the feeder. Make the nectar with 1 cup white sugar in 4 cups water, boil for a few minutes, and cool before serving. Store the extra in the fridge for future use. Clean the feeder and replace the nectar twice a week so it won't go bad and make the birds sick.

The nectar hummingbirds get from flowers and feeders gives them the energy they need to catch the insects that is their primary food. You can set out over-ripe fruit or banana peels to attract insects for the hummers.

TEXAS A&M AGRI LIFE EXTENSION

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Dallas County Master Gardeners are trained volunteers
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www.dallascountymastergardeners.org

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TEXAS A&M AGRI LIFE EXTENSION

Hummingbird Gardening



Dallas County Master Gardener

Best Gardening Practices

Planning and Design: Consider function, location, size, appearance, amount of sunlight, water requirements, budget and maintenance.

Bed Preparation: Remove existing plants, incorporate 3" of compost into the top 8" of soil and mound the bed higher in the center to allow for drainage. Adding 3" of expanded shale will improve the soil even more.

Soil Analysis: Take soil samples in several locations and send them to a reliable lab for testing. Use the results to determine the best fertilizer for your garden. This will probably be nitrogen.

Appropriate Plant Selection: Choose native and adapted plants because they thrive in our climate and soil without excessive watering, fertilization and pesticides. Pay careful attention to the mature size of the plant and follow the suggested spacing. Use a variety of plants that suit the location and function of your garden and that suit each other. Mix perennials and annuals to create blooms in each season. Perennials come back each year but usually have a short blooming season; choose ones with a Plant Hardiness Zone of 8 or less. Annuals are planted each year but bloom for longer periods.

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Efficient Irrigation: Grouping your plants by their water needs makes the garden much easier to maintain. Ground level watering like soaker hoses, drip irrigation, and hand-watering, are most efficient and economical. New plants will need regular irrigation for the first two growing seasons, then the water can be reduced. Water deeply once a week in the absence of rain. This encourages good root systems and increases the plants' resistance to pests and diseases.

Mulch your garden: Applying at least 3" of mulch each year will help the soil to retain moisture, moderate the temperature of the soil in winter and summer, and help prevent weeds. As the mulch breaks down, it provides organic material to enrich the soil. Avoid piling mulch directly on to plant stems.

Appropriate Maintenance: If you follow these recommendations, there will be little or no need for pesticides. If you must use one, read the label to make sure it is the correct product for your problem and follow the directions as written. Remove weeds as you see them.

These are the principles of Earth-Kind® gardening, a program developed by Texas AgriLife Extension, Texas A&M System. The objective of Earth-Kind® is to combine the best of organic and traditional gardening and landscaping principles to create a new horticultural system for the 21st Century, a research-proven system based on real-world effectiveness and environmental responsibility. It provides maximum gardening and landscape enjoyment while preserving and protecting our fragile environment. Putting Earth-Kind® techniques into everyday practice will help your family, your community and your environment. To find out more about Earth-Kind®, go to <http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/earthkind>

Hummingbird Plants

Perennials

Texas Betony – early spring bloomer
Autumn Sage (red)
Flame Acanthus
Turk's Cap – sun or shade
Butterfly Bush
Coral Honeysuckle
Crossvine
Coralbean
Red Yucca
Althea- sun to part shade
Mexican Bush Sage
Texas Star Hibiscus

Annuals

Cypress Vine- sun or part shade
Firebush
Pentas (red)
Cigar Plant "David Verity"

Requirements for Hummingbird Gardening

- No insecticides
- Nectar producing flowers in shades of red are even better
- Continuous blooms spring to fall
- Nearby trees and shrubs for birds to rest on
- Misting area

Gardens can range from a few containers to small beds to whole yards. For maximum enjoyment plant the garden where you can watch it during the daytime.