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Visit Audubon online for more information and tips on creating a bird-friendly yard.

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Cover, clockwise from top left: Mike Fernandez/Audubon; Paintbrush (*Castilleja*). Photo: vkbhat/iStock; Rufous Hummingbird. Photo: birdiegal/Adobe Stock; Mike Fernandez/Audubon; Baltimore Oriole. Photo: Steve Byland/Dreamstime; Columbine (*Aquilegia canadensis*). Photo: Grafissimo/iStock. Inside, bottom left: Coral Bells (*Heuchera sanguinea*). Photo: Tamara Kulikova/iStock. Inside, center: Ruby-throated Hummingbird and Bee Balm (*Monarda*). Photo: mtruchon/Adobe Stock

## Audubon Guide to Attracting Hummingbirds and Orioles



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At least 53 species of North American birds drink nectar—the naturally occurring sweet liquid produced by plants. Hummingbirds and orioles are the main nectar drinkers, but mockingbirds, grosbeaks, tanagers, and several warblers also enjoy sweet drinks from flowers and tree sap. You can bring these nectar-loving birds to your home with a few easy steps. Once they start visiting your garden, it's likely some will stay the entire season and even return the following year.

### NECTAR LOVERS

#### Small birds, big appetites

Hummingbirds and other nectar eaters are some of the most intrepid migrants—they can travel thousands of miles each year. To accomplish these remarkable feats, they rely on the abundant supply of nectar usually found within flowers that have co-evolved with nectar eaters over thousands of years. Although hummingbirds are the tiniest of vertebrates, they have the largest brain and greatest appetite of all birds their size. Hummingbirds must eat once every 10 to 15 minutes and visit between 1,000 and 2,000 flowers per day to sustain their supercharged metabolisms.

Like other migrants, nectar-drinking birds are also vulnerable to extreme weather, disease, and predators. In addition, climate change and development are causing habitat loss, and the birds are threatened by collisions with windows and cell towers.

Backyard gardens, large and small, provide sanctuary for resident and migrating nectar-eating birds. Sugar water feeders provide nourishment, but they are most helpful as a supplement to the natural nectar obtained from flowers. It's best to create gardens that provide real flower nectar as part of a complete habitat that offers shelter, nesting places, and water.

It may take weeks after you've set out flowers and feeders before nectar-loving birds discover your new garden. But if you're lucky, they'll show up much faster—sometimes within moments!

## Creating a hummingbird- and oriole-friendly yard

Flowers, feeders, perches, insects, and water are the key ingredients to a healthy yard that will attract these amazing jewels. Since hummingbirds and orioles naturally frequent openings in the forest and forest edges, they are readily drawn to suburban and rural gardens that offer a mix of tall trees, shrubs, meadow, and lawn. During migration, they frequent parks and urban yards planted with bright flowers.

### START WITH A SKETCH OF YOUR YARD

Indicate the location of your home and outbuildings. Include trees, shrubs, flower beds, and other features that may benefit hummingbirds and orioles. Use your sketch to determine the best location for your nectar gardens. Hummingbird gardens need not be large—even a window box or hanging planter will do.

### THINK VERTICALLY

Grow a cascade of nectar-rich plants by securing a trellis to your house and planting trumpet honeysuckle (*Lonicera sempervirens*) beneath it. Trees and garden sheds can also support sturdy trellises for trumpet vine (*Campsis radicans*). Layer herbaceous or lower-growing plants (see plant selections, opposite) in front of vines. Then add window boxes, tubs, or ceramic pots to create a terraced effect and provide growing places for a variety of nectar plants like *Hamelia patens*, cigar plant (*Cuphea* spp.), and justicias.

### PROVIDE A WATER FEATURE

Like most birds, hummingbirds frequently bathe in shallow water, and may preen or flit through the droplets generated by garden misters, drip systems, and small pump-fed waterfalls. Orioles also prefer shallow water—no more than two inches deep.



### PROVIDE TREES AND SHRUBS

Hummingbirds and orioles use trees for perching and nesting. Large tree trunks may also provide a source of lichens, which many hummingbirds attach to the outsides of their nests with spider silk for camouflage. Hummingbirds usually nest in the forks of small, stiff tree branches; orioles favor the drooping branches of maples, poplars, willows, and conifers. If your garden does not include trees or shrubs, a dead branch with small perching twigs makes a good substitute. Locate these perches near your garden or sugar water feeders.

### LEARN WHEN TO EXPECT YOUR LOCAL HUMMINGBIRDS

This will help you select plants that bloom when hummingbirds are most likely to visit and determine when to put out hummingbird feeders. Don't worry that leaving feeders up too long will prevent hummingbirds from migrating on time; migration is triggered mainly by day length rather than food availability. In regions where winter freezes are rare, some hummingbirds and orioles may stay through winter.

### FAVOR NATIVE PLANTS

Learn which native plants hummingbirds feed on in nearby natural areas, and include these in your garden. Native plants and nectar-eating birds have a long association.

### CHOOSE PLANTS WITH RED, PINK, OR ORANGE FLOWERS, AND WITH A TUBULAR SHAPE

Tubular flowers contain nectar at the bottom, which encourages these long-beaked birds to probe for their sweet meal. In general, flowers that rely on fragrance to attract insect pollinators are not good nectar sources, as most birds have a poor sense of smell.

### SOFT LININGS ARE IMPORTANT

Hummingbirds usually line their nests with soft plant fibers, so grow cinnamon fern (*Osmunda cinnamomea*), which has fuzzy stems, and pussy willow (*Salix discolor*), which has fuzzy flowers. If your yard contains thistle (*Cirsium* spp.) and dandelion (*Taraxacum officinale*), allow some to remain—their fluffy seeds provide nesting material.

### SELECT PLANTS THAT BLOOM AT DIFFERENT TIMES

This provides nectar throughout the growing season. This is especially important in early spring when migrants first return, exhausted from their long travels.

### PLANT PATCHES OF THREE OR MORE INDIVIDUAL PLANTS OF THE SAME SPECIES

This will provide larger quantities of nectar. Also, prune the tips of flowering plants to encourage more flowers.

### AVOID PESTICIDES

Nectar eaters also benefit from eating protein-rich insects. Birds can ingest poisons when they eat contaminated insects, and systemic herbicides can make their way into flower nectar. Let birds be your natural insect control.

## Using feeders

This will help attract the birds until your garden flowers are flourishing and lure birds up close for better viewing. To prepare a sugar water solution, mix one part white sugar with four parts water. Bring the mixture to a boil to sterilize it and dissolve all of the sugar. Store any unused mixture in a refrigerator. Clean feeders every two or three days under hot running tap water, scrubbing them with a bottlebrush to eliminate fungus. Likewise, do not use honey in feeders, as this can grow mold. Also avoid red food coloring—it is unnecessary.

To help attract hummingbirds to new feeders, tie a cluster of plastic red flowers over the feeder entrance. Lure orioles and tanagers up close by offering halved oranges on spikes or grape jelly in special feeders or small bowls.

## Nectar plants for northern gardens

- Bearded Tongue** (*Penstemon* spp.): perennial
- Bee Balm** (*Monarda fistulosa*, *Monarda didyma*): perennial with purple, pink, or red flowers
- Cardinal Flower** (*Lobelia cardinalis*): perennial; requires moist soil, partial shade
- Columbine** (*Aquilegia canadensis*): perennial with orange-yellow flowers
- Coral Bells** (*Heuchera sanguinea*): compact perennial with small red flowers
- Jewelweeds** (*Impatiens* spp.): annual
- Madrone** (*Arbutus menziesii*): northwestern tree
- Manzanitas** (*Arctostaphylos* spp.): low shrubs and groundcovers
- Paintbrushes** (*Castilleja* spp.): annuals and perennials
- Hyssops** (*Agastache* spp): perennial herbaceous
- Salvias** (*Salvia* spp): perennials and annuals
- Solomon's-seal** (*Polygonatum biflorum*): perennial
- Trumpet Honeysuckle** (*Lonicera sempervirens*): well behaved vine with orange flowers
- Trumpet Vine** (*Campsis radicans*): orange or yellow flowers on large vine requiring substantial support
- Twinberry** (*Lonicera involucrata*): low-growing, shrubby vine

## Nectar plants for southern gardens\*

- Coral Bean** (*Erythrina herbacea*): southern shrub or small tree
- Fairy Duster** (*Calliandra eriophylla*): southwestern shrub, blooms year-round
- Fire Pink** (*Silene virginica*): bright red flowered perennial
- Indian Pink** (*Spigelia marilandica*): bright red flowered perennial
- Red Buckeye** (*Aesculus pavia*): small southeastern native tree with bright red flowers
- Standing Cypress** (*Ipomopsis rubra*): southern biennial or perennial

\*Check with local nurseries to determine tolerance for temperature extremes.