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Hummingbird Don't Fly Away

Love, life, happiness, and etc. have been poetically compared to the lowly hummingbird. In some way, we connect with the hummingbird, or is it their sheer beauty that makes our hearts leap when one visits our yard. Hummingbirds simply amaze me. Many people spend a considerable amount of time and effort to attract hummingbirds. In fact, there are ways you can create the ideal backyard haven for these beautiful, energetic, little creatures.

First of all, plant and maintain a natural wildflower or cultivated flower garden with plants that provide nectar for hummingbirds. Begin by becoming familiar with the plants that are the most successful at attracting hummingbirds in your immediate area. Take a walk around your neighborhood and notice hummingbirds using certain flowers for food. By taking note of which flowers and using the very same plants, you'll have a good head start attracting them into your yard. Some excellent hummingbird attracting plants are bee balm, Indian paintbrush, morning glory, honeysuckle, lantana, petunia, snapdragon, butterfly weed, touch-me-not, larkspur, and hollyhock. Although red is probably the most popular flower color among hummingbirds, these birds visit flowers of a great many other colors for nectar. The most successful hummingbird garden would have a mixture of annual, perennial, and biennial flowers.

Next, provide food for the hummingbirds by placing artificial feeders out filled with sugar water or commercially prepared nectar solution. There are many types of hummingbird feeders commercially available in various shapes and sizes. Whatever type of hummingbird feeder you use follow these guidelines.

Keep the feeder clean. They need to be cleaned and refilled at least once a week. If the weather is hot or the feeder is located in direct sunlight, clean and refill it twice a week. Placing the feeders in part shade slows fermentation of the nectar. Nectar for artificial feeders should consist of a four-to-one solution of water and granulated white sugar. This solution should be boiled for a couple of minutes so the sugar can dissolve completely and to retard growth of microorganisms. Honey, brown sugar or artificial sweeteners should not be used in any of the feeders as all of these items can be harmful to hummingbirds.

Separate the feeders by at least six feet to keep one hummingbird from dominating all the feeders. Attach an "ant moat" to the feeder wire to prevent ants from entering the feeder. Placing feeders in part shade slows fermentation of nectar. Once they discover your feeder, hummingbirds will return year after year to the same feeder.

To learn the specifics on gardening we have both free and for-sale publications at our office in the back of the Public Services Building on the corner of Third Loop and Irby. You may also visit our Home & Garden Information Center through our web site at www.clemson.edu/florence. I may be contacted through our web site, amelton@clemson.edu, or 661-4800.

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