

Hummingbird Attracting Plants

Compiled by Gary Phillips, wildlife biologist and hummingbird researcher

Hummingbirds are often referred to as Nature's flying jewels. They are truly fascinating creatures, and are the best known and most loved of all of the North American birds. Their inquisitive nature and intimate relationship with nectar-producing flowering plants, along with a willingness to feed from artificial feeders, allows them to be easily attracted to a garden. Following is a list of plants that are well-adapted to cultivation in the coastal plain of SC and are proven food sources for hummingbirds.

SC Native plant species:

Coast Azalea (*Rhododendron atlanticum*) - perennial
Red Buckeye (*Aesculus pavia*) - perennial
Coral Bean (*Erythrina herbacea*) - perennial
Coral Honeysuckle (*Lonicera sempervirens*) - perennial
Cardinal Flower (*Lobelia cardinalis*) - perennial
Trumpet Vine (*Campsis radicans*) - perennial
Cross Vine (*Anisostichus capreolata*) - perennial
Spotted Jewelweed (*Impatiens capensis*) - annual

Non-native plant species:

Salvia (Sage): there are literally hundreds of species and varieties of Salvia. Some are annual, some perennial; some are excellent hummingbird plants, some are better suited to butterflies. Most salvias do well in the coastal plain of SC with minimal attention. This list is by no means exhaustive, but represents 'tried and true' varieties attractive to hummingbirds in the coastal plain of SC.

Brazilian Sage (*Salvia guaranitica*) – hardy perennial
Autumn Sage (*Salvia greggii*) – hardy perennial
Mexican Bush Sage (*Salvia leucantha*) – hardy perennial
Pineapple Sage (*Salvia elegans*) - perennial
Royal Sage (*Salvia reglia*) – hardy perennial
Cherry Sage (*Salvia microphylla*) –hardy perennial
Eyelash-leaved Sage (*Salvia blepharophylla*) – tender perennial
Rosebud Sage (*Salvia involucrata*) - perennial
VanHouttei Sage (*Salvia splendens VanHouttei*) – tender perennial
Forsythia Sage (*Salvia madrensis*) – tender perennial
Salvia X “Indigo Spires” – hardy perennial
Salvia “Anthony Parker” – tender perennial (a hybrid discovered by Ms. Frances Parker of Beaufort, SC)
Big Texas Sage (*Salvia penstemonoides*) - perennial
Scarlet Sage (*Salvia splendens*) - annual
Texas Sage (*Salvia coccinea*) - annual

Other plants:

Hummingbird Bush (*Hamelia patens*) – perennial
Hummingbird Plant (*Dicliptera suberecta*) - perennial
Firespike (*Odontonema strictum*) – tender perennial
Desert Honeysuckle (*Anisicanthus wrightii*) - perennial
Porterweed (*Stachytarpheta jamaicensis*) - perennial
Red Ruellia (*Ruellia elegans*) – tender perennial
Firecracker Plant (*Russelia equistiformis*) – tender perennial
Cigar Plant (*Cuphea micropetala*) - perennial
Cigarette Plant (*Cuphea ignea* ‘David Verity’) - perennial
Turk’s Cap (*Malvaviscus drummondii*) – perennial
Giant Turk’s Cap (*Malvaviscus drummondii arboreus*) - perennial
Agastache “Tutti fruitti” - tender perennial
Devil’s Tears (*Phygelius X rectus*) – perennial
Shrimp Plant (*Justicia brandegeana*) - perennial
Flowering Maple – (*Abutilon pictum*) - perennial
Pentas – (*Pentas lanceolatas*) - annual
Lantana (use taller varieties for hummers) – (*Lantana camara*) - perennial
Mexican Sunflower (*Tithonia sp.*) - annual
Cypress Vine (*Ipomoea quamoclit*) – annual
Cardinal Climber (*Ipomoea X multifida*) - annual
Red Morning-glory (*Ipomoea coccinea*) - annual
Abelias (*Abelia sp.*) – perennial
Camellias (*Camellia sasanqua*, *C. japonica*) - perennial
Silk Tree, Mimosa Tree (*Albizia julibrissin*) - perennial
Butterfly Bush (*Buddleja davidii*) - perennial
Zinnias - annual
4-o’clocks – perennial

Equally important to attracting hummingbirds are trees and shrubs that provide cover for perching, nesting sites, and places to forage for insect prey.

Hummingbirds CANNOT live on nectar alone; approximately 50% of the Ruby-throated Hummingbird diet may be tiny insects. Good cover plants should be as tall as possible and include:

Wax Myrtle (*Myrica cerifera*)
Camellias (*Camellia sp.*)
Azaleas (*Rhododendron sp.*)
Hollies (*Ilex sp.*)
Oaks, esp. Live Oak (*Quercus virginiana*)
Pines (*Pinus sp.*)
Red Maple (*Acer rubrum*)
Sycamore (*Platanus occidentalis*)
Baldcypress (*Taxodium distichum*)
Hackberry (*Celtis laevigatis*)

Suggested Reading:

Ruby-throated Hummingbird (Robert (Bob) Sargent)
Hummingbird Gardens (Barbara Neilson and Nancy Newfield)
A New Book of Salvias (Betsy Clebsch)
Peterson's Field Guide to the Hummingbirds of North America (Sheri Williamson)
North American Hummingbirds (Steven N. G. Howell)
The Hummingbirds of North America (Paul Johnsgard)

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