

Ruby-throated Hummingbird (Archilochus colubris)

Hummingbirds are unique to the Americas. East of the Great Plains in North America, the only major species commonly found is the Ruby-throated Hummingbird. The male Ruby-throated Hummingbird is emerald green and white with an iridescent red throat. Females are slightly lighter green and white. The tiny birds are about 3" long. Their wings make a humming sound and they chirp while feeding.

Hummingbirds migrate to overwinter in Mexico and Central America, some crossing the Gulf of Mexico in one flight. Males are the first to arrive in Wisconsin in the spring and are the first to leave in late summer. Females and young migrate south in early fall. Hummingbirds eat tiny insects and flower nectar. They also enjoy sugar water provided by hummingbird feeders.

After mating, the male does not help to raise the young. The female constructs a tiny walnut sized nest made of spider webs and lichen. Nests are usually high up in trees and rarely seen. The female lays 2 white pea-sized eggs. Young hatch after about 13 days and remain in the nest about 21 days. The female continues to feed the young for at least a week after they fledge.

Birdscaping for Hummingbirds

While hummingbirds love the feeders we provide with sugar water (1 part white sugar to 4 parts water), most of their diet consists of insects (25%) for protein and nectar from flowers.



Female at feeder

Hummingbird flowers usually are tubular with nectar at the bottom which is easy to reach with their long bill and tongue. The flowers often have projecting stamens and pistils making it more likely that the birds will touch them while feeding. Many hummingbird flowers are red or shades of red such as orange or pink. Red is a color that the birds can see easily but is only seen as black by bees and other insects.

It is important to have a variety of flowers that will bloom and offer nectar throughout the season.

In the spring, Wild Columbine is one of their first sources of nectar.



Wild Columbine – Aquilegia canadensis

Summer blooms such as Red Monarda, Wild Bergamot, Blazing Star, Wild Hyssop, and Turk's Cap Lily are some favorites.



Wild Bergamot – Monarda fistulosa

In early fall, the birds will frequent Cardinal Flowers and Great Blue Lobelia.



Cardinal Flower – Lobelia cardinalis

While hummingbirds will visit many of your flowers, planting natives will be more beneficial. Many native flowers have evolved to attract hummingbirds. Natives produce more nectar than cultivated varieties.

Provide both sun and shade areas in your yard. Hummingbirds will require trees and shrubs for nesting and perching as well as areas of flowers. Favorite trees include sugar maples, crabapples, hawthorns, and pussy willows. Avoid using pesticides as the chemicals can harm the birds and

reduce the insects they require. Provide sources of shallow water.

If you provide hummingbird feeders, try to provide more than one as males are territorial and will guard a feeder. Also keep it clean and change the liquid frequently to prevent the birds from becoming ill.

Resources:

Cornell Lab of Ornithology – All About Birds <https://www.allaboutbirds.org>

Midwestern Birds Backyard Guide by Bill Thompson III 2013 Cool Springs Press

Birdscaping in the Midwest by Mariette Nowak 2007 Itchy Cat Press

Birds of Wisconsin Field Guide by Stan Tekiela 2004 Adventure Publications

For more information contact:

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*Photos by Steve and Christine Weingarth

Attracting Hummingbirds



Hummingbirds are beautiful and fascinating creatures. This publication contains information about hummingbirds that frequent Wisconsin gardens and what you can do to encourage them to visit yours.