**Hummingbirds**

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The migrating ruby-throat hummingbirds have come and gone, and the resident black-chinned hummingbirds will soon settle in to their breeding territories, if they haven’t already.

For a short time you may only have the nesting birds in and around your landscape visiting your sugar water feeders. Later in the summer the young of the year will find the feeders.

In addition to the sugar water feeders, the resident black-chinned hummingbirds will gather nectar from blooming plants on your patio and in the garden. Among their favorites are zinnias, pentas, butterfly vine, Salvia gregii (autumn sage), lantanas, esperanza, the blue summer sages and firebush.

Pentas, zinnias and firebush are especially suitable for the patio.

Pentas will bloom in sun or shade. They are available with red, white, pink or lavender blooms. The flowers are small and tubular but are arranged in large clusters. Penta is a hot weather annual.

Firebush also has a small tubular flower. As the name indicates, it has a red bloom. The new growth on firebush is also red, and the plant often has good fall color. Firebush is a perennial that will return each summer to form a 2-foot wide and tall globe if planted in a 3-5 gallon container. Plant firebush in full sun.

The large zinnias are very showy in a large container such as a half whiskey barrel but there are also smaller versions such as “Lilliput” that can be planted in smaller containers. Plant zinnias in full sun.

There is a wide range of hummingbird feeders. They can be as simple as a test tube mounted on a stick poked into the flower garden to as complex as works of art in colored glass and elaborate designs. Hummingbirds will come to all of them. The easiest to use are those with an easy-to-clean reservoir and access to the sugar water that takes advantage of the long bill of the hummingbird to exclude ants and bees.

Two products, one manufactured by A-1 Best (Poteet, TX) and one by Perky Pet are readily available and functional. They work well when they are hung on a nail or wire under the eaves or from a trellis.

A key to locating the feeder is to put it at a location that is easy to observe, outside of a window where people congregate in the house or near table and chairs on the patio. Hummingbirds become quite tame and accepting of observers.

Mix the sugar at one part sugar by volume to four parts water. Red food coloring is optional. No research shows that the coloring hurts the hummingbirds but it probably is not necessary. The curious hummingbirds find sugar water sources whether it is red or clear.

Boiling the water also does not seem to be necessary if you are taking the action to protect the birds.

In my landscape, ants, bees and woodpeckers have become an issue.

I combat the ants by moving the feeders in a rotation from several sites to keep the insects from becoming use to a single location. Some gardeners use ant moats filled with cooking oil to keep the ants from the sugar water. Water doesn’t work in these moats because it evaporates within hours in the summer.

During cool or dry weather, bees will often visit sugar water feeders. Nectar-producing blooms and/or moisture are hard for them to find. Bee guards work well or you can just allow the bees to have a share of the sugar water. The bees are less active in the morning and evening allowing the birds access time.

For at least seven years now golden-fronted woodpeckers have visited my hummingbird feeders. They even bring the young to show them the ropes. Five or six woodpeckers can drink lots of sugar water but they are almost as much fun to watch as hummingbirds so I let them share.