

Hummingbird Garden Flowers

A close-up photograph of a hummingbird in flight, hovering near a vibrant red flower. The bird's long, dark beak is extended towards the flower. Its wings are blurred, indicating rapid movement. The background is a soft, out-of-focus grey, making the bird and flower stand out. The overall composition is dynamic and focused on the interaction between the bird and the flower.

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Preface

This ebook is about growing garden flowers that attract hummingbirds. Many of these flowers provide excellent color, are easy to grow, and sure to draw your attention but also for the hummingbirds visiting your garden. You can purchase many of these plants from garden centers or online nurseries.

This guide is not the definitive listing of all “hummingbird-magnet” flowers. You can include many other species and varieties in your garden beds and borders, depending on where you live in North America. The plants listed in this ebook have proven to be ones these birds prefer to visit and drink nectar.

The information on each plant may contain inaccuracies about their growing conditions and hardiness. Each plant has its USDA hardiness zones, best growth conditions, and recommended varieties to find and grow. Please be aware these plants may not be available, discontinued, or replaced for better varieties by nurseries. Some are so rare we may never find them.

The following plants use their Latin name first, then by a common name or names.

The digital photos are of the flowers at my home, garden centers, public gardens, and Creative Commons (CC0) licensed images.

Introduction



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Beautiful garden flowers always attract attention. They not only entice us but bees, butterflies, and a group of small birds, so animated — if not cartoonish — that we pause in wonder when we encounter them. These are the hummingbirds.

Their allure to a flower is by probing inside it with their long beak or bill. This unconventional act is to sip the sweet life-giving nectar and unintentionally pollinate the flower. This is an excellent example of a win-win situation for both the bird and flower.

Over 300 hummingbird species inhabit South and Central America. In contrast, only a few migrant species reside during the summer in the southwestern and western regions of Mexico, the United States, and

southern Canada. One species, *Archilochus colubris*, the **Ruby-throated Hummingbird**, shown above, spends its summers in the eastern United States and southern Canada. It winters in southern Mexico and Central America.

Most of the flowers listed in this publication relate to the Ruby-throat, for it is the only one that visits my flower garden. Hey, it's a beauty!

Please note that this ebook is not the definitive listing of all hummingbird-attracting plants. This publication acts only as a guide to grow several commonly found garden plants that will attract all hummingbirds. Growing the following flowers in quantity and variety ensures these birds will visit your garden and stay longer in your area throughout the summer.

Readers in other parts of the US, especially in southwestern locations, have many native flowers that your various hummingbird species find irresistible. I have little knowledge of them (or the birds), so I have not listed them here. Please check with your local garden centers to identify those native plants to include in your gardens. Your birds will hum a tune of gratitude.

Additional information included in this ebook concerns how to provide extra incentives to keep your hummingbirds in your garden. A few considerations are hanging feeders containing sugar water and why to allow a few insect pests to live on the flowers to benefit hummingbird nutrition and health.

Most of the following plants will thrive in your garden. Larger garden centers and nurseries will also offer potted plants for faster growth and bloom. With some planning and then planting, you will ultimately enjoy the benefits of not only having a gorgeous flower garden but also of admiring those "flying jewels" that will call your home their fabulous summer home.

Portions of the following text may include information copied from my earlier ebooks. Here, I have included additional plants and updated earlier informational material.

To find plants or seeds of the following species and varieties, please visit your nearby larger garden centers or search online to find specialty nurseries that grow and sell them.

Agastache – Hyssop

Agastache aurantiaca



A dessert out in the desert.

We are not the only ones that go wild for these plants, for hummingbirds and butterflies love them also. Hummingbirds and these plants go together like a hand and glove. They will dart from blossom to blossom, sipping nectar as they hover about them. If you want to attract your neighborhood hummingbirds, these perennials are a necessity.

Agastache is a native southwestern North American plant that loves hot and relatively dry, gravelly soils. They are hardy to zones 6 and above, but if planted in a southern exposure area (or in a rock garden) with well-drained soil, they should survive in zone 5.

These perennials become woody over time and produce hundreds of small but brightly colorful salvia or sage-like blossoms all summer into the fall. Rub the leaves with your fingers to release an exhilarating peppermint or anise fragrance. Be careful — you may rub them too much, for it is difficult to stop. Those fragrances are simply addictive!

The flower colors are a breathtaking blend of apricot, orange, peach, yellow, a hint of pink, and rose. Their buds usually have a contrasting tint of purple. When the sun shines through the petals, they glow like hot embers. Most varieties are everblooming and set no seeds, for they are sterile.

Growers also refer to *Agastache* as ‘Hyssop’ in many older garden catalogs and books. If you want your own private summer carnival in your garden, make sure you include these plants. With all the color, pleasant aromas, and hummingbird flying acts, your garden will undoubtedly be a fun place to visit.

These plants prefer to grow in as much sun as possible and in very well-drained soil. Their growth height is over three feet tall, and they become very bushy. Since they are of desert heritage, they tolerate drier soil longer than most other perennials.

To increase the likelihood of surviving a frigid winter, try not to over-fertilize these plants. Adding a fresh layer of compost in the spring is all they need to grow and bloom well over the summer. Without excessive nutrient “goodies,” they will harden their woody stems for better winter survival.

You can easily find several varieties in garden centers, small nurseries, and online establishments. You can grow some types from seed, but the best strains are from propagated stock.

Aquilegia – Columbine

Aquilegia canadensis plus other species and hybrids



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Spurred into hovering action.

Being migratory birds, hummingbirds can face harsh conditions while moving from the warm equatorial climates into colder springtime northern habitats. It is not only colder weather that threatens their survival but also, in part, the limited availability of nectar-producing flowering plants. Somehow, these birds travel to southern Canada and even up the western coastal areas into Alaska.

One way to help these mini-migrants make this arduous journey a little easier is to plant spring-blooming flowers in our gardens (supplemented with hanging feeders). Columbine is one important plant you should grow abundantly in your beds and borders.

These hardy perennials provide beautiful, spurred flowers for several weeks in the spring. The word “spur” is botanical jargon (not referring to the star-shaped cowboy boot doohickeys) but to tubular petal extensions that store nectar to entice insects or, in this case, hummingbird pollinators.

These perennials bloom during early spring to early summer. They have a wide color range and seem to cross-pollinate religiously to form many multi-colorful hybrids.

Hardy from zones 3-9, they grow well in partly shady locations such as the edges of woodlands, rock gardens, and flower borders. Try to find *Aquilegia canadensis* (shown above) with red and yellow flowers. They may not be as floriferous as hybrid varieties, but they brighten-up shady areas and attract hummingbirds like a neon roadside cafe sign attracts hungry motorists.

Most species and varieties do well growing in well-drained, fertile, moist soil but can tolerate drier soils. If grown in full sun, they need to have regularly damp soil.

Forget about finding many Columbine species in garden centers—most plants offered usually are hybrid varieties that tolerate more sunlight. Your best bet to locate more species is from exotic seed suppliers and raise them from seed. The seeds can be a challenge to germinate. They need a cold and moist period (stratification or over-wintering phase), and then they will germinate the following spring. Good things bloom for those who wait!

These are excellent blooming plants for hungry, flight-wary hummers as they travel north to their summer breeding grounds.

Buddleia – Butterfly Bush

Buddleia davidii



You can always rename it as your hummingbird bush.

We all love the flowers that make butterflies happy. If this shrub's (or woody perennial) attractive flower spikes attract them, it also seduces hummingbirds. For years, gardeners observed not only our large-winged insects gravitate to the colorful and highly fragrant flowers but also the hummers. They will feverishly dart about, and French kiss the tiny blossoms.

Are some butterflies (including the birds) attracted to specific colors of *Buddleia*? For butterflies, scientists have discovered it depends upon their species — some prefer white, others pink, while others like blue.

There may not be any similar research concerning the birds, but who cares? Go ahead and plant several colorful varieties!

Grow these beautiful shrubs in full sun and rich soil. They are hardy from zones 5 to 10.

These plants are woody shrubs, but in northern climates, the top growth will die back to the ground after each winter but quickly re-grow from underground shoots in early summer. Like most woody perennials, avoid over-fertilization of the soil. A lean, low nitrogen growing medium helps the stems become “woodier” to ensure better winter cold survival.

Arranged in an elongated spike, the massive cluster of tiny florets bloom by midsummer and into fall. These flower spikes release a strong fragrance of a blend of citrus, honey, and pine. You may smell something else.

You can find many varieties in larger garden centers and nurseries. The hummingbirds do not mind which color you grow.

Many colorful and potted varieties can be found in larger garden centers and nurseries.

Campsis – Trumpet Vine

Campsis radicans



Here, the flowers are larger than the birds.

If you were to design a flowering vine that commands (or should I rephrase that as “demands”) our attention, this would be a prime candidate. Their flowers also attract the Ruby-throated Hummingbird. These birds love these “just-right-fit” flowers to lap up the abundant nectar.

Early 17th century English colonists arriving in Virginia, USA, had an ‘eyes-wide-open’ look when first viewing and admiring this vine in full bloom. They were so impressed that they collected samples of the vine and seeds for a return voyage cruise back to England.

So, what is so special about this vine? Well, let's call it a "meat and potatoes" type of plant. It is woody, full-bodied, excels in rapid growth, and sports large, thick-petaled reddish-orange to yellow flowers. They are semi-tubular with flaring ends that resemble a horn like a trumpet. For an even greater impression, the blossoms are in clusters and hang down from the expansive vines. They are of the perfect size for hummingbirds to hover and drink the sweet nectar.

Now, you would think it must be a tropical plant but, — surprise — it is a semi-tropical to temperate vine. It is native to the eastern and southern regions of the United States but can extend its influence north, even into New England and southeastern Canada. It doesn't have the same big-time blooming show as in the southern regions, but it's still impressive.

Listed as hardy from zones 5 to 9, they can squeak by at zone 4 in more protected areas. Blooming occurs for about two months, beginning in late spring — perfect timing for newly arriving hummers.

As usual, there is a downside to growing this vine. It has the potential to become invasive. The plant sports many tendrils that wrap around other shrubs and trees. Recorded specimens reaching over 30 feet tall in warmer areas of the country are not uncommon. When raised in a fertile garden, it goes hog-wild in rapid growth. It thrives outside woodlands, fence rows, neglected farm fields, and open urban areas. Vigorous, fresh shoots arise from the roots — some, several feet away from the main stem — and with all those flowers, it forms a multitude of seeds.

I can attest to this invasiveness tendency in a small but limited way. One year, I planted a potted vine near a trellis. Two years later, I decided I did not want it anymore and "ripped it out." A couple of months later, up sprouted several new vines several feet away from their original position. It was no fun digging and uprooting these "upstarts," and a year later — yes, smaller vines re-sprouted. So, take my cue and be careful where you plant this colorful and vigorous vine.

Canna

Canna indica



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There is an advantage in being single.

If you desire to add a tropical feel to your flower gardens, you can't go wrong with including these colorful plants. It is not only their striking flowers but also the large leaves that offer plenty of visual enjoyment.

Many varieties flaunt excessively colorful variegated leaves, which look like stained glass windows back-lit by the sun. Some gardeners will shyly confess that it is these leaves they enjoy more than the flowers. Many varieties showcase brilliant yellow, pink, red, and orange shades

intermix with white stripes and splotches. Strangely, botanists (and growers) discovered no pure white species or variety exists.

Cannas are native to tropical and subtropical regions of Central and South America - prime hummingbird locations. Over time, different species became “transplanted” into temperate and other tropical areas of the world. These plants became popular for their ease of culture and their adaptability to form hybrids and grow in any garden.

Grown from thick rhizomes, their ultimate height — based on how tall the flower stalk grows — can extend up to eight feet or more, depending on the variety. Each year, new types are all created with many varieties growing to “acceptably comfortable” heights — for us — but hummingbirds prefer taller types.

All Cannas prefer to grow in full to partial sunlight and continuously moist, highly fertile soil — either in the garden or in containers. These plants thrive in humid conditions but will need regular watering during times of drought.

Cold region gardeners (below zone 8) have splendid success growing these plants by planting the rhizomes in larger containers and setting them outside after the last frost. By fall, bring these pots indoors for the winter. By withholding water during this time, you simulate natural dormancy for the rhizomes.

The critical question is, which Canna can you plant to attract hummingbirds? Varieties with single-petaled red blossoms draw in these birds, for they contain plenty of nectar. Famous examples are **Cannova® Rose** or the species types called **Indian Shot** (*Canna indica*) or **India Prince**. This one has garnet or single blood-red petals above dark green or greenish-black stems and foliage. Double-flowered types, although being gorgeous, may produce less or no nectar.

These and other single-petal varieties (no matter the color) are best found searching online Canna specialty nurseries.

Crocosmia

Crocosmia montbretia



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Forget about going downtown – the neon lights are pretty here in your garden.

Now, if you really want to advertise your flower garden as “The Place” for hummingbirds to gather far-and-wide, this corm-forming plant will draw their attention. Botanists also refer to *Crocosmia* as Montbretia. The name change is to confuse unsuspecting people wanting to plant these corms in their garden but cannot find *Crocosmia*. Flower gardening can quickly start migraine headaches while searching for obscure re-named flowers.

Hardy from zone 5 and up, this excessive flowering, clump-forming plant will give your garden a luxurious tropical atmosphere. The hummingbirds will feel like they never left their winter home. The leaves are narrow, sword-shaped, like a *Gladiolus*, but the inflorescent spikes are ablaze with hundreds of fiery red flowers.

From early summer to early fall, there will be plenty of flowers for you and the hummers to have plenty of floral enjoyment. Most varieties are shades of red, such as **Lucifer**, shown above, a popular vibrant blood-red type which may have the longest blooming time, to various orange and bright yellow varieties. All act as neon lights to attract the neighborhood hummers.

Most garden centers should offer small bags of these corms alongside the numerous varieties of *Gladiolus*. If you cannot find them there, many internet nurseries will have them available — including more unusual varieties.

Plant the corms in sunny and well-drained, fertile soil locations for best blooming. Unlike *Gladiolus*, do not dig up the *Crocasmia* corms. They will over-winter safe and sound if you add a protective covering of mulch by late fall.

Cuphea – Bat Face Cuphea; Tiny Mice

Cuphea ignea × micropetala; Cuphea llavea



A flower to make a hummingbird giggle when tickled.

Native to Mexico, Central, and South America with over 200 species, these woody or herbaceous shrubs are hardy only to zone 9 and above. Even with all those known species, only a handful currently grow in gardens. These plants can grow to over three feet tall and wide (oh what a sight that would be), but they can only muster as low-growing annual shrubs for lesser zone gardens.

Blooming abundantly over the summer, these plants can become an excellent addition for bedding and edging a border. Most produce an average of inch-long tubular red, orange, yellow, pink, purple, and white

blossoms (including many Technicolor blended variations), which draw in all the neighborhood hummingbirds. Ornithologists and gardeners believe that *Cuphea* and *Salvia* plants are the two best hummingbird-attracting type garden flowers.

For many suitable flowering plants, hummingbirds prefer taller growing ones for their dining pleasure. This is understandable, for if they were to flutter here-and-there near ground-level, they would be easy prey for predators such as kitty-cats.

So, what can we do to prevent our feline friends from dining on our avian friends? A straightforward solution is to grow these nectar-enriched plants in hanging baskets. Granted, we can't grow all the plants listed in this ebook in these baskets, but many can do so.

Planting *Cuphea* in high-placed containers, mostly hanging baskets, provides greater eye-level appeal for us and easy beak and tongue placement for the hummers.

No matter where you plant them, make sure they are basking in plenty of sunlight and well-drained, fertile soil. These plants dislike shade and will not bother blooming.

You can grow these plants from seed (if you can locate some), but it will take longer for them to grow and bloom. No, find some plants sold in garden centers or online, pot them up in a hanging basket, and by summer, enjoy the acrobatics of your grateful neighborhood hummers.

A question arises: "What can we plant in our gardens for maximum floral and hummingbird enjoyment?" For your reading time limitation, I will concentrate on two species/varieties you need to grow in hanging baskets.

My first recommendation is '**David Verity**' (*Cuphea ignea* × *micropetala*), shown above, is commonly nicknamed Large Firecracker Plant or the Cigar Plant. This is an excessive blooming type with inch-long, tubular, reddish-orange blossoms highlighted with purplish petal filaments. The anthers, style, and stigma jut outward — a perfect

alignment to brush the head or tickle a hummingbird's belly to adhere pollen for cross-pollination.

This hybrid variety tolerates cooler temperatures better than most *Cuphea* species. This shrub can grow upward to four feet tall in ideal warm climates, but in cooler areas, count on two feet.



Another *Cuphea* species, *Cuphea llavea* or **Bat Face Cuphea** (shown above), flourishes in hanging baskets to draw attention to the birds.

If there is one plant I will grow each year, it will be this gorgeous species. My first attraction was its vivid colors of red and purple. The second attraction is the name; the flowers really look like the bat's face and ears. I think I can see some fangs jutting from the mouth.

No matter what color of all *Cuphea* species blossoms, you will enjoy their constant blooming from late spring to fall frost. All the

hummingbirds calling your home garden as their summer vacation spot
will thank you for growing these outstanding flowers.

Dicentra – Bleeding Heart

Dicentra spectabilis or *Lamprocapnos spectabilis*



Avian valentines.

Described earlier with the *Aquilegia* or Columbine plants, early spring is a dangerous time for northern bound migratory hummingbirds. Not only is colder weather sapping their strength, but few nectar-filled flowers are present. Another essential spring-blooming perennial to consider adding to your gardens (besides the Columbines) is the native Bleeding Heart.

Once known as *Dicentra* (and still is with us diehard gardeners), botanists now classify it as *Lamprocapnos*. I'm sorry, but this name

sounds like a newly discovered dinosaur fossil or a comical beast straight out of a Dr. Seuss book. No, I will stick with the old name.

Dicentra is hardy from zones 2 to 9 and grows well in shady locations. It looks great when planted in a woodland setting and is trouble-free if you plant it in moist but well-drained, fertile soil. Dry soil and blistering sun result in poor blooming and premature early dormancy. This dormancy “turns people off” in growing it, for they expect flowers all the time. Sorry, but enjoy the colorful blossoms when they bloom in the spring. Your resident or passer-by hummingbirds will enjoy not the colors but a well-needed slurp of high-energy nectar.

The leaves are dark green, while some varieties have a delightful blue-green coloration.

The common name of the flowers perfectly describes them as heart-shaped “puffy” blossoms. They are usually pink, rose-red, or pure white. The pink and red ones are the most stunning, for they resemble a broken heart with the bottom showing a large drop of white blood (think of it as blood plasma). Don’t worry—a few varieties offer crimson red drops, giving these flowers a jolt of NCIS realism. It is here where a hummingbird can insert its beak to suck in the high-octane nectar.

There are other colorful species available. One, *Dicentra eximia*, or the Fringed Bleeding Heart, is a wildflower native to the eastern parts of the United States. It is long blooming, potentially all summer in shady areas. Its smaller blooms do not have the noticeable heart-shaped characteristics like those of the **Old-Fashioned Bleeding Heart**. The leaves are deeper-cut, like a fern, and last all season.

You can find both species in many garden centers and online nurseries.

Digitalis – Foxglove

Digitalis purpurea



I'm sure the nectar gives them a "buzz" after drinking it.

I believe this hardy biennial or perennial (and its near relations) is probably the most beautiful garden flower. I know there are plenty of opposing viewpoints on other contenders, but the *Digitalis* tubular or funnel-shaped flowers dangling from their tall stalks look stunning.

It is not only their petal base-color but the excessive spotting of contrasting colors within the blossoms (technically called nectar guides) that gives them a technicolor brilliance unsurpassed by many other flowers. It is positively mesmerizing to stare into blossoms and "get lost" amongst these vivid colors and speckled patterns.

From a hummingbird's perspective, these blossoms are also impressive, but as a vital nectar-refueling station.

Most *Digitalis purpurea* varieties can grow over six feet tall, but this depends on providing the best growing conditions. They include being raised in a partly shady, well-drained, but moist, fertile soil. Probably the best variety to achieve this towering achievement is growing the **Excelsior Group**. This type provides plenty of pink, lavender, and white-based flowers, all having neon contrasting nectar guide spots. This variety is "the tops" in *Digitalis* enjoyment!

Although hardy from zones 4 to 8 and classified as a biennial, the *purpurea* species can be perennial if you snip the spent flower stalks off to prevent excessive seed formation.

As with all species of *Digitalis*, these plants are very poisonous if eaten. All parts of the plant contain a chemical called digitalin. Cardiologists commonly use this compound to treat heart conditions, especially in controlling congestive heart failure. Isn't it amazing that something so beautiful and deadly can also save lives?

But what about hummingbirds? Are they not affected by this toxic brew of heart-attack-inducing compounds? Apparently not, for its nectar may not contain this potion of death but a simple sugar water solution. Mother Nature would not want to poison her chief pollinators of these striking flowers.

If you wish to have blooming flowers sooner, raise the **Dalmatian Hybrid** strain. This group is the latest in faster-blooming Foxgloves. Their multicolored flowers can be in bloom within four months after sowing indoors in late winter. Not only do they bloom well in a garden border or bed, but they also can grow in containers. These plants will grow to nearly three feet tall and are perfect for impatient gardeners and hungry hummers.

Fuchsia – Ladies Eardrops

Fuchsia hybrida; magellanica 'Riccartonii'



Our feathered “sky-dancers” can also make some frenzied moves.

To brighten any cool, shady areas, you can't go wrong by displaying the festive colors of cascading fuchsia flowers. Also revealed, along with these flowers, is the hyperactive fluttering of hummingbirds. They can't resist sampling one flower — they slurp nectar from them all.

For our pleasure, visit any garden center and prepare yourself for the overwhelming beauty of stunning colors and abundance of bloom. The colorfully gaudy sepals and billowy petals are usually bicolored (sometimes tri-colored) of rosy-red, white, pink, and royal purple.

For a strange reason, they always remind me of the 1800s French Cabaret dancers and their fluffy skirts and dresses performing frenzied high-kicks at the Moulin Rouge. Oh, sorry... I must have been channeling painter Toulouse-Lautrec at the moment.

Garden centers sell these semi-woody, cascading, tropical plants in various-sized hanging baskets. The plants prefer to grow in bright indirect light but can tolerate partial but not deep shade. The plants will bloom well if displayed under an overhang or trellis structure to prevent being exposed to excessive sunlight. Make sure they grow in moist, fertile, well-drained soil.

There is an incredible number of hybrid varieties created from various species. A few varieties grow semi-upright but lack the adequate height to look their best. If you plant these in containers and place them on a patio or deck, they will look more attractive.

Have you ever thought to yourself wishing those colorful Fuchsia plants were hardy? Yes, that would be spectacular. Sorry, keep on hoping, but at least one type can survive cold temperatures. The **Riccartonii** variety (called the **Hardy Fuchsia**), shown above, is native to Argentina and, more so, to Chile. It is not cascading but a taller, upright growing type — acting as a semi-woody perennial.

This plant is cold-hardy (easily wintering over in zone 6 if adequately protected) than our very tender common tropical species. Where frosts are infrequent during the winter, this shrub is deciduous (drops its leaves), but where below-freezing temperatures regularly occur, the tops die back. Mulching helps protect the underground growth-crown and the root system.

Plant this Fuchsia in very fertile, moist, well-drained soil, preferably in an eastern-facing location that receives full morning sunlight to partial afternoon shade. Avoid hot, dry, full sun, south-facing places.

Under the best growing conditions, this plant can grow to over 10 feet tall and wide, but my plants never seem to accomplish this feat — a relatively modest three feet tall and wide. No matter, they bloom all

summer abundantly with those gorgeous purple and neon pink blossoms. The neighborhood 'hummers' will visit these flowers on a minute-by-minute basis.

I do not know why, but most garden centers do not offer this plant. My best guess is, it is more profitable selling the hanging basket Fuchsias. Try an Internet search to locate mail-order plants. Raising this variety in your garden is worth all the trouble of hunting for it.

Hosta

Hosta plantaginea (plus other species and hybrids)



Maybe these flowers don't "taste right" to them.

You may think our popular shade-loving perennial would be a hummingbird's most visited plant to suckle nectar. Hey, the white or pale lavender flowers are tubular and produce several over many weeks. From my own observations and other witnesses, the birds will sip the nectar, but they appear not overly enjoying them. If other flowers are blooming nearby, hummingbirds will buzz on over to them and sample their sweet wares.

Why is this? One theory is that there may not be too much nectar available during the day, but more is produced during the night. Hosta flowers, being fragrant, attract moths during that time while the hummingers are in a deep sleep. That is a theory, but it may explain why I (and later you) will not see as much hummingbird activity around the Hosta patch as, let's say, a bed of salvia plants.

For you new gardeners, this perennial is number one for low-maintenance shade garden enjoyment. With outstanding hardiness (zones 3 to 9), adaptability, gorgeous flowers, and beautiful leaves, you can't go wrong with having these plants in a partly shaded garden. Plant them in shadier, north-facing areas with well-drained, fertile, but moist soil. Always make sure the ground never collects pools of water, which causes the roots to rot.

Hosta plants' height varies, but their flower stalks can top to over three feet tall or more — especially for the larger cultivars. No wonder hummingbirds are curious to sample the flowers, for they will feel safe to fly about at that height.

Today, there is a gazillion (well, close to it) Hosta species and their varieties for any shade garden. The trouble is, which plants will you grow? A trip to your nearest garden center will provide you with a confusing assortment to ponder.

Don't neglect mail-order, online nurseries, for they always have rare and delectable offerings to brighten your shady acres. One of the first Hostas species to come into general garden use is *Hosta plantaginea*, famous for the super fragrant, large, white flowers. Its nickname of **Old August Lily** reflects the time it blooms. Another recommended variety to grow is **Royal Standard**, a mutation with large variegated leaves. Many garden centers also offer this outstanding plant.

Impatiens – Common Bedding and Wild Impatiens

**Impatiens walleriana; hawkeri; capensis;
pallida**



If I am burned at the stake for heresy, please add my ashes to a flower bed.

Some annual garden flowers experience receiving regular visitations of hummingbirds throughout the summer. One particular annual is our common bedding Impatiens plants. Hostas may be the go-to perennial for planting in shady areas in a garden, but the honor of shady bedding annuals goes to the Impatiens. They grow everywhere in practically

every garden. They are the most purchased flowering plants in any garden center or nursery. All hail *Impatiens walleriana*!

Please don't hate me for what I am about to relate to you. Impatiens are, for me, sorry to say, BORING. There, I admit it. This would be heresy-talk in many gardening circles! Impatiens mainly serve as subjects of "flower bed gazing." They lack any multi-tasking enjoyment, such as providing cut-flowers or attracting many pollinating insects such as bees and butterflies. But we can attract hummingbirds, though, if we manipulate how we grow these flowers.

Impatiens employ a similar floral construction like our previously mentioned *Aquilegia* or Columbine flowers. Both groups of plants have tubular petal extensions called spurs. Although Impatiens have smaller spurs, their function is the same — storage containers of nectar. But having masses of flowers blanketing the ground presents challenging complications for the birds. They "feel" uncomfortable being so close to the ground. Who knows if sharp claws and teeth are nearby to pluck them from the sky?

What if we could raise the Impatiens farther from the ground to a safer height? Here is where growing these annuals in hanging baskets is of benefit, not only for ease of hummingbird feeding but also for our enjoyment of seeing them and the flowers close-up.

Another group of Impatiens is the **New Guinea Impatiens** (*Impatiens hawkeri*), also providing beautiful colors for hanging baskets and high-placed containers. These varieties have better disease resistance and tolerate more sunshine. They can also offer more vivid colors to the flowers and some with eye-catching variegated leaves. They look fabulous when displayed in partly sunny areas.



Related to our bedding Impatiens are their wild woodland cousins **Jewelweed or Touch-Me-Not** (*Impatiens capensis; pallida*). Native to most of northern and eastern North America, these annual wild Impatiens thrive in shady to partly sunny, moist woodlands, roadside ditches, and stream banks.

The most common species is *Impatiens capensis*, or the gorgeous **Orange Spotted Jewelweed** (shown above) with various yellowish-orange shades to deep reddish-orange flowers with long nectar spurs. They also sport bright, enhanced spots or blotches that act as visual cues to attract pollinators such as hummingbirds and various bees (especially bumblebees). A not-so-common sister species is the **Yellow Jewelweed** (*I. pallida*), with pure yellow pouch-like blossoms.

Under the best of fertile, moist soil habitats, these plants will produce tall-growing but hollow, watery, or succulent stems with hundreds (no, thousands) of flowers blooming from midsummer until a killing frost.

During this time, a typical plant will produce elongated seed capsules that behave like tiny hand grenades. When ripe, these pods will burst open with a surprising micro-explosive force at the slightest touch of a finger. You may not realize this, but our regular garden Impatiens and related Balsam produce the same reaction.

I am not sure if these plants act as invasive weeds, but here in “my neck of the woods,” they can become overgrown in shady areas. Since they are native and pretty, we do not control their spread. These beautiful plants benefit hummingbirds and bumblebees’ survival, especially in late summer and into the fall. For our hummers, these plants provide copious amounts of nectar to help fuel their way south, back home to the tropics before late fall. These flowers help supplement their energy requirements when not refueling in nearby flower gardens.

If possible, try to raise these plants in a wet and shady area of your garden. Collect fresh seeds in the early fall and slightly cover them with soil. By spring, they will germinate, even in cold, soupy-sloppy soil. They will grow quickly, unaided, into succulent bushes of life-sustaining petal-packets of nutrition for your south-bound hummingbirds.

Ipomoea – Morning-glory

**Ipomoea coccinea; x multifida; quamoclit;
lobata**



Featherweight boxing using lances.

I (and many others) have observed the following species attracting hummingbirds better than our regular funnel-shaped Morning glory flowers. I notice when our common “glories” are blooming, the hummers will visit them, take a quick look and suddenly dart to the following species to drink nectar.

One feature all morning-glories share in common is they are all tropical plants. Yes, not one hardy floral-soul in the entire group. As long as they

experience a warm, moist spot to set down roots, they are happy to grow as annuals.

They are all impressive and easy-to-grow vines but will need a supporting structure, like a trellis or fence — or even tall bamboo poles — to wrap their climbing tendrils around. Plant them in a sunny, well-drained area. Do not make your soil too fertile, for you want to make lots of flowers instead of foliage.

All morning glories prefer warm growing conditions, both in the air and soil temperatures. Gardeners can have difficulties raising the young vines if they grow them in chilly weather and soil.

The following vines appear as small, tubular, star-shaped red flowers. The **Spanish Flag Vine** (*Ipomoea lobata*) is the exception, and I will describe it later.

These vines are confusing for new gardeners to distinguish unless you look at their leaves. *Ipomoea coccinea* (the **Red Morning-glory**), being native to the eastern half of the United States, has three-lobed, heart-shaped leaves. It is invasive by producing large amounts of seeds, so plan to grow it in areas where it cannot spread. The *quamoclit* species (**Cypress Vine**) has strikingly different lacy, fern-like leaves. The hybrid of both species, *Ipomoea multifida* or the **Cardinal Climber**, has a “hand and fingers” leaf appearance. Being a hybrid, it is sterile and forms no seeds. Unfortunately, it does not produce as many flowers as the other two species, and it is a challenge to locate seeds from garden centers.



The most popular species grown in many gardens is the Cypress Vine. Discovered flowering in Central America by early explorers, it was not long afterward reported growing in Italian gardens by 1500. Thomas Jefferson was the first person in the newly formed United States (Version 1.0) in 1790 to enjoy its beauty in his gardens at Monticello. Tom always enjoyed collecting rare and beautiful plants for his home. This vine is more easily controlled but still forms many seeds.



Another Morning-glory relation differs in appearance from all other species. Here, the blossoms are more tubular and arranged on a spike — instead of the familiar funnel or star-shaped look. This is *Ipomoea lobata*, or the **Spanish Flag Vine**, shown above. Its older Latin names are *Mina lobata* and *Quamoclit lobata*.

The petals are bright red and golden yellow — colors representative of Spain's flag — thus the nickname. Another common nickname is the "Firecracker Vine" for its constant colorful floral display.

A single flower has changeable colors — red (in the unopened bud stage) to orange, bright yellow, and then to white. It is at this white stage where the stamens and pistils fully extend for pollination. The blossoms display these color changes down the spike's length — technically called a raceme.

Now, consider having hundreds of these spikes loaded with all these colorful flowers. From a hummingbird's perspective, this would be

paradise! This vine attracts these birds by the millions. Well, no, that is a dramatic falsehood (aka “a vibrant blatant lie”) — but, truthfully, they LOVE this vine.

One summer, I grew several various colorful Morning-glory varieties. The birds overlooked them but competed against one another to sip nectar from this vine’s flowers. Watching them was at first comical, but then they turned vicious! Have you ever seen hummingbirds fight? They attack each other by thrusting with their rapier-like bills. “*En-garde, you vile thief!*” They will even charge at each other, as in avian jousting. Grow this vine to see all the thrilling action and mayhem.

Having the potential to grow upwards to 12 feet tall or more, it also branches outwards, making an excellent covering for a fence. Unlike other Morning-glories, these flowers bloom all day.

Garden centers rarely offer the above-described species for sale, so you will need to purchase seeds from larger seed companies.

Ipomopsis – Standing Cypress; Texas Plume; Red Gilia

Ipomopsis rubra



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Listing the “positive” and “negative” reasons for growing this hummingbird-magnet.

Once viewed with its spikes of glowing, bright red, star-shaped, tubular flowers orbited with hummingbirds, you know you have to have this plant growing in your garden. Ahh, if only it were so simple to raise.

This is one plant that, in theory, should be easy to grow but usually proves not. It is one of those confusing, frustrating, and irritating plants

that impatient gardeners hate to grow. The reason is that botanists classify it as a biennial plant.

One disturbing fact is that seed companies fail to advise gardeners properly on how to sow and grow it. As a biennial plant, *Ipomopsis* seeds require a cold and wet period to germinate in the spring and a full year of vegetative growth. The plants wait until the following summer to bloom, and boy do they ever!

Another area of confusion is with hardiness zones. Growers sometimes list *Ipomopsis* as an annual or as a perennial hardy to zone 5. I wish it were reliably so, but zone 6 is the best cold-climate zone you can hope for. No, this plant prefers warmer climates, being native to the US and Mexico's southwestern areas. Here, this plant can survive some winter cold and snow, but not the long duration and Siberian-cold intensity of northern states. The overwintering rosette of fern-like leaves remains green but dormant until the warmth of spring. Foxglove and Hollyhock plants also grow like this.

One other factor for plant survival is for it to grow in very well-drained soils. Like many other desert-loving plants, it will develop a long taproot to obtain water in the dry, hot summer months. This root will only grow if the soil is sandy or gravelly. Regular, mulch-enhanced garden soil can rot the roots, so provide a different drier garden location to raise this plant.

OK, what about this plant and the hummingbirds? If you have grown your own plants or you bought some from a nursery, and they successfully lived over the winter, long stems — most rising to over five feet tall with several side branches — will arise from the rosette of leaves. Throughout the summer, a prodigious cluster of vivid red tubular blossoms will be in bloom. Newer hybrids now have shades of yellow and orange, but the vibrant red selections are most popular to our eyes.

Some growers and gardeners say *Ipomopsis* flowers are “hummingbird magnets,” drawing in the birds from far and wide to quench their thirst for nectar.

By late summer, cut off most of the spent flower spikes but leave a few to dry. Once the seeds are ripe, scatter a few here and there to begin a new generation of plants for the future. It is possible to have a few older plants survive (as perennials) for blooming during the following summer.

Kniphofia – Red Hot Poker; Tritoma; Torch Lily

*Kniphofia galpinii; northiae; rooperi; thomsonii
and hybrids*



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"What we've got here is failure to communicate."

(from actor Strother Martin in the 1967 movie *"Cool Hand Luke"*.)

The only thing that can get you burnt by this vibrantly colorful plant is mispronouncing the Latin name. I am notorious for butchering Latin names, so I wasn't close to saying it right. Most botanists pronounce its

name *nuh-fow-fee-uh*. There. We can all rest easy now to avoid severe mental anguish.

Here is a handy-dandy tip: When in doubt about saying a Latinized name in public, say it quickly — your way — and then talk about the plant. People don't have time to think if you said it correctly or if their own pronunciation has always been wrong. If someone questions your pronunciation, just smile and ask him or her to say it. Then smile.

Sorry about my sudden derailment of thought — my brain-train jumps the track quite often these days. Oh well, back to the matter at hand.

When looking at the above photo (or an actual flower spike), the common nicknames are self-explanatory. Depending on the species or variety, these spikes are single to multiple-colored with crimson red, bright orange, or yellow.

There is a color change as the flowers develop. The bottom yellow blossoms are mature and ready for pollination. Further up the spike are the young, underdeveloped bright red flowers. These act as a diner's neon lights to attract hungry customers — in this case, flocks of touristy hummingbirds.

Native to South Africa, *Kniphofia* is hardy from zones 5 to 9. Having that lily-like nickname, you may think this plant grows from bulbs, but it doesn't. It forms spreading clusters of underground rhizomes. The foliage resembles large clumps of coarse, thick-bladed, serrated grass. From late spring to midsummer, three to five-foot-tall flower spikes arise from these clumps.

Like daylilies (*Hemerocallis*), as the rhizomes expand, more flower spikes develop. After a few years of age, you can expect large clusters of these gorgeous flowers. Your neighborhood hummingbirds will thank you for this early summer treat.

You can easily find *Kniphofia* potted plants from several internet or mail-order nurseries. Garden centers, though, may prove questionable in having them available. Be prepared to experience difficulties in

communicating this plant's name and nursery workers' acknowledgment of it.

Lantana

Lantana camara



“Oh yes I'm the great pretender...”

I love this woody tropical shrub for its dazzling red, orange, pink, and bright yellow flower clusters. My fault with it (with no real fault of its own making) is the slow growth with limited blooming for northern areas during the summer. In warm southerly locations with a longer growing season, this shrub will produce taller branches and be in constant bloom.

Those living in warm climates try to grow the taller and bushier varieties—some to over four feet tall. They will look great in flower beds but try to plant some in larger containers for a patio or deck. Here

you can get more acquainted with the neighborhood butterflies, hummingbirds, and their fantastic insect imposters, the **Hummingbird Clearwing Moth** (*Hemaris thysbe*), shown below hovering over a zinnia and the **Snowberry Clearwing Moth** (*Hemaris diffinis*).



These moths closely resemble a hummingbird — fooling many people and predatory birds — while hovering over flowers with their rapid-beating, blurry-viewed wings. Their long coiled proboscis, for sucking up flower nectar, and their antenna give away their avian impersonation. Ah, what great pretenders!

These low-maintenance plants prefer hot weather to thrive, full sunlight, and toleration of drier soil conditions, for limited periods, obviously.

The foliage has a somewhat disagreeable order when handled, but, like Marigolds, plant them and don't bother handling them all summer.

You can find potted plants of different colorful varieties in many garden centers. You may find a source for seed — but why bother? Potted plants are ready to grow and attract all those hummingbirds to your outdoor areas.

Lobelia – Cardinal Flower

Lobelia cardinalis



Well, I guess it depends on your religious affiliation — or the lack of it.

Most flowers listed in this ebook are garden varieties, but some, like this plant, are native wildflowers that attract hummingbirds. Here, the floral color is a vibrant red. We may associate the common name to the male Northern Cardinal bird (*Cardinalis cardinalis*) but more likely to the Roman Catholic Church Cardinals' stylish red robes.

This hardy perennial (zone 3 on up) is native from Central America to Mexico, extending to most of the US and into the southern areas of Canada. My goodness, that is an immense area! There is one caveat,

though — this plant grows naturally in permanently moist habitats, such as near streams, ponds, valleys, and outside wet woodlands. For a place in your garden, it will need to live in corresponding conditions. These plants cannot tolerate soil that dries out for extended periods.

A typical plant can grow up to six feet tall (more or less), including the floral spikes, called an inflorescence. Clumped together on each spike are many bright red, tubular flowers. Each blossom has three lower petals and two upper petals arching over the stamens and pistils. All these petals fuse, forming a small nectar-filled tube attached to the spike. Botanists believe this petal construction is better adapted for pollination by hummingbirds. Bees and butterflies apparently have a tough time probing the flowers when searching for the floral nectar. For these birds, it's easy-peasy.

For most northern regions, blooming begins midsummer and extends to the first fall frost. Southern areas can depend on an extended blooming season on either side of early summer to late fall. For migrating hummers, these plants are a godsend.

You can find seeds and potted plants in specialized wildflower nurseries and catalogs. I have encountered them growing in larger containers offered by garden centers. If growing these plants from seed, they need a few months of a cold-moist period (called stratification) to stimulate germination in the spring.

Please remember that these plants will need a constantly moist, partly sunny environment to thrive. A liberal addition of mulch will help to add soil fertility and keep the soil cool and moist.

Lonicera – Honeysuckle

Lonicera sempervirens; Lonicera x brownii



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For a hummingbird, the perplexing question is, “Which one do I suckle first?”

There are over 180 species of honeysuckle found growing throughout the Northern Hemisphere. Most are ornamental vines and woody shrubs hardy from zones 4 to 9. They all grow well in full sunlight to partially shady areas.

Some species or varieties bloom only in the spring with a massive flush of blooms, while others flower from summer to fall. Some release

powerful aromas to attract pollinating insects such as butterflies and moths.

A majority of honeysuckle blossoms attract not only our admiration but droves of hummingbirds throughout the summer. Of the many species and varieties available for purchase from garden centers, here are three excellent examples that attract the hummers.

By all means possible, plant “**Major Wheeler” Honeysuckle** (*Lonicera sempervirens*), shown above, in your garden. It has reddish-orange to pure red, skinny, tubular flowers. Oh my, is it stunning! This vine is a powerhouse bloomer and will attract all the hummingbirds in the neighborhood. Yes, I may be exaggerating, but there will be plenty of them.

This vine can grow upward to over 10 feet tall but spreads outward. Make sure it grows on a very sturdy trellis or fence. It is tolerant of partial shade and blooms non-stop from early to late summer. Some gardening authorities feel this is the best honeysuckle for a gardener to own since it is easy to take care of, is very hardy (zone 4), and resistant to many plant diseases. You know it is popular when it quickly becomes sold out in garden centers!

Another variety to grow is **Dropmore Scarlet Honeysuckle** (*Lonicera x brownii*), with massive numbers of orangish-red tubular blossoms throughout the summer. It is hardy from zones 4 to 9. Reported to be semi-fragrant (sadly, my nose can't detect one scent molecule), these “floral magnets” draw in many visitors of butterflies and hummers around the immediate area. Its vines can rise to over 12 feet tall and wide. To control their height and spread, wait until fall or early spring to clip back excessive growth.

Most Honeysuckle vines and shrubs require practically no care. As long as they have plenty of sunlight, well-drained, fertile soil, and something to grow on, they will quickly establish themselves. A visit to your larger garden centers should have these and other varieties available.

Maurandya (or Asarina) – Climbing Snapdragon

Maurandya barclayana (scandens) or Asarina scandens



Sorry, these flowers don't attract dragons or dragonflies.

Asarina scandens is no longer accepted as the official Latin name and is now *Maurandya scandens*. Many nurseries are reluctant to change this "official" name and continue to grow and sell them as *Asarina*. Since I am writing this ebook, I will now refer to this plant in the genus of *Maurandya*. There, maybe I can sleep better now. I don't want the International Code of Botanical Nomenclature police pounding on my door demanding I accept the new name classification.

Anyway, this unassuming climber-creeper vine comes with familiar nicknames such as Creeping Snapdragon, Creeping Gloxinia, Snapdragon Vine, Twining Snapdragon, and a few more. Many vines are robust climbers or ramblers, but this plant is the opposite — it seems weak, limpy-wimpy, and frail. The stems may look delicate and wiry but, surprisingly, compensate with vigorous growth. It will form longer stems that will wrap around each other and with any available supporting structure such as trellises, arbors, or nearby shrubs. For most gardeners, it provides an impressive display in hanging baskets.

The tubular, trumpet-shaped, brightly colored flowers resemble open-faced snapdragons. If you have hummingbirds in your area, it will not be long until you see them visiting these flowers.

Hardy only from zones 9 and up, it is strictly an annual vine for most gardeners. The blossoms bloom all summer into fall when cooler weather ends the show.

The flowers are a fantastic purple, such as the variety **Joan Lorraine** (shown above) or dark wine-red, rose-pink, and white varieties. For the hummingbirds, the flower color does not matter. If you grow these vines, they will come.

Provide these vines with full to partial sunlight and fertile, well-drained soil to flourish.

You may have problems finding them in garden centers. They are easy to grow from seeds, and it would be the best way to obtain the colors you wish to enjoy.

Monarda – Bee Balm

Monarda didyma



This is a hummingbird's cup of tea.

To attract all the hummingbirds and butterflies in your neighborhood, you need to include this dazzling perennial in your garden. It is one of the longest blooming and definitely the showiest, with vivid red to purple flower clusters. Their hardiness is from zones 3 to 10.

Related to the mints (but less invasive), the colorful flower clusters generally lack a scent, but the leaves have a pronounced minty-orange fragrance.

Native to the eastern half of North America, native Monarda grows in moist woods and along stream banks. It has common names such as

Bee Balm and Oswego Tea. While the hummingbirds drink the abundant floral nectar, treat yourself to a glass of ice tea while watching them on a delightful summer afternoon.

These plants can rapidly spread in rich soil but are manageable. They enjoy full sun to part shade to grow and bloom well.

Many varieties are available, but **Jacob Cline** (shown above) is one of the largest bright red types with outstanding mildew disease resistance. The size of these magnificent red flowers is incredible — one flower-head can rest in the palm of your hand. The plants bloom all summer and are a magnet to attract several hummingbirds.

Check your local garden centers for many types are available of these splendid perennials.

Monardas (and other garden plants) are susceptible to fungal problems during the summer. For the sake of hummingbird health, never apply fungicide (or insecticide) to your plants. When shopping at garden centers, always look for disease-resistant varieties.

Penstemon – Beardtongue

Penstemon palmeri and many other species



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I wonder if some flowers also have mustaches?

Let's play a gardening 'mind game' involving a hypothetical crossing of two unrelated plants and wondering what the offspring would look like. Here, what happens when you cross a Foxglove (*Digitalis*) with a Snapdragon (*Antirrhinum*)? The result, if it could occur, would resemble this hardy wildflower perennial.

Depending on the species, *Penstemon* plant flower spikes can reach up to six feet tall, covered with flared trumpet or tubular blossoms. Unlike

those clustered together on a Foxglove spike, these flowers are extended outward.

A key question about this plant is what's with the Beardtongue nickname? It involves the shape and function of the flower. Each snapdragon-like blossom has a strangely developed, non-functional stamen called a staminoid, having hair-like extensions. This odd appearance resembles a small, fuzzy beard.

So, what does this have to do with hummingbirds? Well, this apparent floral "bling" accessory may give the hummers a stop-and-stare response to further investigate these flowers. Finding them an appropriate tubular dimension for easy nectar-drinking access, they partake in having a sweet meal while inadvertently pollinating the flowers. From the plant's point of view, that weird flower stamen actually proves beneficial.

The Hummingbird Society reports that Penstemons are, in part, one of the best perennial plants for attracting the hummers. Hardy from zone 3 and up, their flower colors range from vibrant red to all shades of pink, blue, purple, white, and bicolors with contrasting veins. To a hummingbird, it doesn't matter the color, or flower size, as long as those blossoms hold plenty of nectar.

These plants, though, require special care to thrive in your garden. First and foremost, they need exceptional soil drainage. Constant damp or sopping wet ground is the death knell for them. Some growers report raising them in pure sand or gravel does nothing to retard growth or blooming. Gee, if only all plants were as simple to grow like that! They prefer occasional watering like any plant, but not an overabundance.

Native primarily to the western areas of North America, Penstemons have extended their range elsewhere — as long as the growing conditions are tolerable. Most species and varieties have a limited bloom-time that extends from June to early August. They produce an overabundance of flowers — and later seeds — that may compromise their ability to restore enough energy for them to survive the coming winter. Well, they manage it somehow.

Grow these plants in as much sunlight as possible and, of course, well-drained fertile soil. Unlike most garden flowers, avoid the need to mulch these plants to prevent retaining excess soil moisture. A rock garden would be an ideal location to raise these plants.

You can grow these plants from seed sown in the fall (necessary for winter stratification) or purchase potted nursery plants. The problem is what to plant — there are many species and varieties to choose from. Garden centers may limit the choices for you because these perennials are not well-known to the public. Try to grow a few types for the benefit of enjoying those gorgeous flowers and excited hummingbirds.

Petunia

Petunia exserta



We should include this petunia in a suicide prevention program — immediately!

You may think nothing is new in petunia gardening, but in 1987, word spread throughout the world of a new species being discovered. In 2007, explorers traveled to southern Brazil and found only fourteen *Petunia exserta* plants (shown above) in existence. This scarce species has bright red, star-shaped flowers highlighted with yellow pollen-laden anthers.

For most petunia species and varieties, bees (especially bumblebees), butterflies, and night-time flying moths pollinate their flowers. For this

species, hummingbirds are the principal pollinator.

Seeds collected from these wild plants are now available for you to grow in your garden. That is great, but there is something tinged with uneasiness about this species. The problem is the wild plants are slowly disappearing in their native environment—not from human exploitation but from natural causes. This species is gradually interbreeding with other *Petunia* species and is slowly phasing itself out of existence. Mother Nature is allowing this one to commit species suicide!

Well, not on our watch — as usually stated when push comes to shove. More seed companies are slowly offering this species seed for home gardeners. I have yet to find plants available in garden centers. Hey, nursery people — get with the lifesaving species-saving program!

Grow this petunia like any other type in full sun, well-drained, fertile soil. Their bright red flowers will make a mind-altering, neighborhood admiring bedding or border display. But... let's give the hummingbirds some attention and grow several plants in hanging baskets. I have witnessed them fighting (or to coin a term — flight jousting) over territorial rights to suckle blossoms from a few baskets. Don't make a hummingbird angry.

Salvia – Sage

Salvia greggii; Salvia guaranitica and other species



Fits them like a glove.

Alright, stand back, for there is about to be an explosion of vibrant colors — not only from flowers but of hummingbird plumage. If you need to choose only one type of hummingbird-magnet plant, Salvia will be the one — guaranteed.

Salvia, also known as Sage or Hummingbird Sage, is the most prominent member of the Mint family with a tremendous number of annual, perennial, and woody shrub species and varieties. These plants share common characteristics of the mints, such as square-shaped

stems, aromatic leaves, and fused petals forming a tube containing the sweet nectar.

Like the closely related Agastache plants described earlier, many Salvia species and varieties are spectacular in their summer-long display, attracting people and hummers alike.

I must clarify my beginning statement about explosive, vibrant colors. Instead of having a rainbow of coloration, Salvia usually broadcasts two light wavelengths — red and blue. But these stunning colors are the ultimate in intensity, brilliance, and radiance. There are other paler shades available, such as orange, pink, purple, and white, but for sheer visual excitement and jaw-dropping amazement, the reds and bright blue varieties are the ones to grow.

It is easy to identify red flowers for attracting hummingbirds, but so do those electric-blue shades. As long as the flower structure is acceptable for the hummers, they will flutter here and there from flower to flower to drink the sweet elixir of nectar.

Depending on the species or hybrid variety, Salvia can grow from one to six feet tall and hardy from zone 4 and up. They all share standard growth requirements such as sunny, warm-to-hot, and well-drained to dry locations. Hey, you can also grow the shorter types in containers and see the hummers, bees, and butterflies close-up.

The next vital question is what to plant to attract as many hummingbirds as possible. As usual, and as repeatedly mentioned in this ebook, the red-flowered types are the primary draw for the hummers but never overlook growing the vibrant blue or purple varieties.

There are so many to choose from. Well, here's an outstanding red species/variety called *Salvia greggii* '**Furman's Red**' (shown above). This hardy perennial (to zone 5) grows to three feet tall and less wide with hundreds, no, thousands of glowing blood-red blossoms throughout the summer. Growers and hyperactive gardening-enthusiasts swear this type draws in the hummingbirds far and wide.

For a stunning cobalt blue variety, you can't go wrong by including *Salvia guaranitica* '**Black and Blue**' (shown below) in your garden.



Many *Salvia* flowers have colorful bracts or modified leaves surrounding the actual flowers. These bracts provide contrasting colors, highlighting the flowers even more. This variety is a perfect example of this contrast of colors which the hummers appreciate.

Many seed catalogs, especially those specializing in wildflowers, will offer different species and hybrid varieties of *Salvia*. Most types are easy to grow from seed but will require time to grow to their full blooming potential. It may prove challenging to purchase your “wish-list” plants from local garden centers. Your best bet is finding them via specialized internet nurseries raising rare plants. Several varieties are outstanding in vibrant color and hummingbird attraction.

There are many other *Salvia* species and associated varieties available to grow in your garden. You can always begin with the commonly

grown bedding species called *Salvia splendens*. Garden centers and nurseries provide plenty of colorful varieties for sale in the spring. You can also grow them from seed, but potted plants will give you (and the hummingbirds) a head start in enjoying their blossoms. This species is always a standout for all its eye-popping colors. Most varieties grow under two feet tall but will bush out to provide outstanding bedding displays. The hummers, though, would prefer taller plants.



Another recommended species/variety to grow is the **Honeydew Melon Sage** (*Salvia elegans*), shown above. It is an excellent annual having a beautiful cantaloupe melon perfume when you rub the leaves. I love this variety for its yummy scent and the bright, red, tubular flowers.

This variety blooms all summer and attracts the hummingbirds from all over the county—or should that be country? Well, you never know! It is an excellent plant for bedding and containers. I prefer this variety over

the typical **Pineapple Sage**, a similar type but blooms late in the year for my area. It smells just like its name, but, for me, blooms a day before a killing frost. It never fails.

Most of these annual species and varieties will produce more flowers in warmer southern climates. This is especially important for migrating hummingbirds during the fall months.

Spigelia – Indian Pink or Woodland Pinkroot

Spigelia marilandica



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Call me Frustrated.

In Herman Melville's novel *Moby Dick*, Captain Ahab became psychotically obsessed in harpooning that giant white whale. For me, I am frustrated in trying to purchase and grow this native zone 5 wildflower. I haven't ventured into Ahab's mental state — yet.

I first viewed this absolutely gorgeous plant in a public garden a few years ago. I had no clue of its identification, and apparently, neither did

the park's staff. From them, I would surmise its Latin name was '*Idon'tknow whatitis*'. Eventually, with help from an internet search, I finally discovered the name of this elusive plant.

The colorful flowers and the constant attention to them by the hummingbirds enthralled me. I desired "that plant" to grow in my garden but, as usual, proved to be futile in achieving. One of Life's Laws is "the more you want something, the harder it is to obtain it." Let me coin that as "Ahab's Law."

Since my first introduction to this wildflower, I have searched high-and-low for it, either by online nurseries or local establishments. They always listed it as 'sold out' or a crop failure. These past two years (as of this ebook publication date), one larger garden center I frequently visit was raising bloom-sized plants in gallon-sized pots. But they were not ready at the time of my visit. They advised me to inquire about availability each week after that. You guessed it — I missed one week of asking and later discovered all the plants became sold out. And so, the search continues. As commonly uttered by disappointed baseball and football fans in my area, "Well, there's always next year!"

OK. What's so grand and glorious about this plant, you are asking. Let's begin with a bit of background information. Native to the southeastern United States, *Spigelia* is a clump-forming perennial which grows near woodland edges or within cool, moist woods. Tolerant of shady conditions, the plants grow (and bloom best) when exposed to partial sunlight during the day.

You would think, being a wildflower, people living in its range would grow it extensively. No. Apparently, few people (on average) have never seen these plants or know of them. No one bothers to walk in woods or forests anymore and discover what beautiful things live there.

Anyway, this plant blooms in the late spring for about a month with stunning red with bright yellow interior, star-shaped tubular blossoms.

Ruby-throated hummingbirds "somehow" find these flowers within the woods and appreciate drinking the plentiful nectar. This floral oasis

within a tree-filled desert helps the hummers re-fuel themselves for their continued trek northward.

Most plants grow to less than two feet tall and wide. Considered not within their flying comfort zone, the hummers will still achieve the vital duty of pollinating those flowers.

Garden-raised plants will produce more blossoms than the wild stock since the growing conditions will be more ideal.

I hope you have better luck finding and raising this beautiful plant in a partly shady area of your garden. Avoid Ahab's Law by nonchalantly saying to yourself that you may or may not consider growing it in your garden. Fate will reward you with obtaining a pot or two in a short time. For me, I'll still be waiting... and waiting... and waiting....

Tithonia – Mexican Sunflower

Tithonia rotundifolia



This is a hummingbird's idea of a margarita.

There is an old adage, "for every rule, there is always an exception." This plant demonstrates this belief, for practically every plant listed in this ebook has tubular-shaped blossoms that attract hummingbirds. This eye-catching annual plant has an open-flower display like a daisy.

These flowers provide the favorite hangout for all the neighborhood butterflies and hummingbirds throughout the summer. They zero in on these reddish-orange flat-topped blossoms, which must exude plenty of nectar. You and your children or grandchildren should sit on lawn

chairs and watch them flutter all day, alighting on each flower head. This would be an enjoyable way to spend a delightful summer day!

Tithonia is native to Mexico and also grows wild in Central America. It is easy to raise from seed and cultivate in any garden. On average, each plant grows to an average of five feet tall, is bushy, and there will be many flowers to enjoy from summer to fall.

Best growth and blooming occur when planted in full sunlight, but tolerate less fertile drier soil. Growers agree it is one of the most drought tolerant tall-growing flowers you can grow in a garden. You don't have to worry about watering it if you are away for an extended period. One plant can produce several side branches over the summer, highlighting several of these long-stemmed flowers to enjoy from summer to fall.

Varieties called **Torch**, **Yellow Torch**, and **Sundance** are available as seeds from many catalogs and garden centers.

Tropaeolum – Nasturtiums

Tropaeolum majus



When aphid infestations are a good thing.

One of the easiest to grow garden annuals, the Nasturtium is also one of the most vibrantly colorful types available for your garden. The large blossoms are shades of red, rosy pink, yellow, orange, and white. Many have contrasting markings.

As previously mentioned, with flowers having nectar spurs to store nectar for a pollinator, Nasturtiums also has them and appears to provide an adequate length for a hummer's bill and tongue to lap up the plentiful sweet liquid.

One problem with this arrangement is Nasturtiums may look like vines but don't have the ways-and-means to travel upward. They are sprawling plants, and if they lift off the ground, it is because of having supportive help from surrounding plants. Why is being off the ground more critical for the hummers? As previously mentioned, they feel more comfortable feeding off the flowers at a greater height. Flowers sprawled across the ground — being so tempting to a hummer — can be potentially dangerous, for a hungry kitty-cat may prowl nearby.

For this reason, I recommend growing these plants in hanging baskets. Here, those long, trailing stems can cascade downward. But another problem arises — Nasturtiums are notorious for “hiding” their flowers behind their oval leaves. Heavens! Our hummingbirds will still be timid to plunge headfirst into a jungle of leaves and stems to locate the blossoms. How do we solve this perplexing dilemma?

One simple way is to avoid growing these plants in excessively fertile soil. Too much nitrogen fertilizer will make the plants produce more leaves than flowers. For hanging baskets, use regular potting soil, and some compost and gravel (for better drainage) will be adequate for better flower production. Occasionally, add a weak solution of commercial fertilizer, or, better yet, water weekly with “compost tea,” that is, compost steeped in gallons of water.

One variety, available from seed stores, can extend the flower stems farther away from the leaves. The **Alaska Series** has a mixture of floral colors but also highlights white-splotched variegated leaves. Although not a sprawling plant, this variety holds the flowers high above the foliage.

Nasturtiums are easy to raise from seed if sown in warm soil and raised after the threat of frost. Garden centers and nurseries rarely offer these annuals since they sometimes do not transplant well when grown in pots. You should be able to find the colors you prefer from seed companies. As usual, Hummingbirds prefer the red shades but will settle for whatever blossom colors are available to suckle the nectar.

One other important consideration when growing these annuals for the hummers is to allow the usual adherence of aphids (feeding on the plants) to remain. Aphids are always present on these plants during the summer. We usually try to eliminate them using “bug-spray” or soapy water, but why should we allow some to remain on the plants?

Not only do hummingbirds slurp the nectar when visiting the blossoms, but they also dine on these tiny insects (along with small spiders) when visiting these and other flowers. Aphids are an excellent source of protein and also act as little bags of sugary candy for the birds.

If the infestation is too severe, spray the plants with soapy water late in the evening, wait a few minutes, and then rinse off the plants. Do not apply any insecticides, for these chemicals will harm the birds.

Weigela

Weigela florida



One supporting actor usually “steals the show” in any performance.

Every spring, people always get giddy about planting new roses, lilacs, hydrangeas, azaleas, rhododendrons, hibiscus, and other shrubs or small trees. But Weigela always seems to be "backstage" and out of any accolades and praise. But no more.

Landscapers often describe this shrub as an "old-fashion" deciduous landscape shrub for its profuse springtime blooming of tubular or trumpet-shaped blossoms. Their color is traditional bright red, but

newer varieties sport all shades of pink, deep garnet, and stunning white.

Even the leaves draw rave reviews for having not only your basic green but eye-catching variegations, vibrant golds, and deep-bronze. To a northward migrating hummingbird, these colors do not matter. Only those wonderful nectar-filled flowers are a welcome sight to visit.

It may surprise you that Weigela is a close relative of *Lonicera*, the honeysuckle vines and shrubs. Like them, Weigela arches its branches six feet and higher with an equal extension width. Garden borders and beds will suffer from this overwhelming dimension unless used as a separate landscape planting. Newer varieties are being bred for smaller homes and properties.

Hardy from zone 4 on up, this shrub is relatively carefree once established. Like most shrubs, it prefers plenty of sunlight and fertile, moist but well-drained soil.

Blooming is prolific during the spring, and new hybrids can extend into early summer. With many blossoms, this extended blooming helps attract the newly arriving hummingbirds to a free meal on their northward travels.

Years ago, nurseries and garden centers only offered red-flowered Weigela. Today, there is a revival in hybridizing new varieties, maybe not so much in flower color but with greater emphasis on leaf color. Other "improvements" include developing compact types that complement our suburban lifestyle. Although the flower colors are various shades of red and pink, more blossoms appear all along the branches. Don't be surprised if you spot a few bonus blooms during the summer.

Depending on garden center availability, you may prefer to grow the following varieties:

Wine and Roses® (also named *Weigela florida* 'Alexandra') is a smaller-growing type, perfect for smaller gardens. Its mature growth can top to be seven feet tall and wide. If its size is impressive, so are the

foliage and flower colors. The leaves are burgundy-purple, highlighted with neon pink, tubular flowers.

Want a similar but larger variety? **Midnight Wine®** (also known as *Weigela florida 'Elvera'*) is equally stunning, both in leaf and flower color.

Hey, what about a variegated-leaf type? Look no further than growing... wait for it... the **Variegated Weigela** (*Weigela florida 'Variegata'*). Slower growing than our regular full-powered photosynthesis types, this variety ultimately matures to a respectable five-foot-tall and wide. Its plethora of cotton candy-pink blossoms is sure to attract you and the hummers.

There are several other varieties available in your nearest nursery or garden center.

Let's give this understudy shrub a starring performance in our gardens. It will provide an excellent blooming act and receive glowing reviews from hungry hummingbirds and butterflies. Bravo!

Attraction Incentives and Advice



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Sometimes, bribery is necessary to achieve wanted results.

There are other garden flowers hummingbirds will visit in their search for nectar. Many do not have tubular red blossoms, but there is something about them that interests the birds. Usually, based on a questionable rule, if butterflies visit the flowers, so will the hummers. After all, they are all searching the flowers to determine if they contain some nectar.

Planting the flowers listed in this ebook will not guarantee you instant hummingbird visitations. If your neighbors' flower gardens (or hanging feeders) draw in the birds, chances are you will have them come to your garden. But are there ways to increase that chance as quickly as

possible? Yes, there are several ways to entice the birds and keep them in your flower garden. Here are some ways to achieve this goal:

- Purchase one or more hummingbird feeders. Most are transparent plastic globes that hold a solution of sugar water. Usually, one or more tubes have a red feeding end or flower design. You do not have to purchase expensive models for simply built feeders are adequate. Feeders having plastic perches (avoid metal ones) are beneficial to provide rest for weary wing-fatigued hummers.
- Hummingbird experts recommend the ratio of four parts water to one part white sugar. For example, dissolve one cup of sugar into four cups of warm water and mix thoroughly. Please use white sugar and not honey. Never use artificial sweeteners. Begin with a partial fill of your feeder and store the leftover solution in the refrigerator. Once the birds arrive and begin feeding, you can add more of the solution to the feeder.
- You do not need to add red food coloring in the sugar water solution to attract the birds. Most authorities feel the coloring may be potentially harmful to them.
- Try to hang the feeder in a shaded location near your flowers. Feeders placed in direct sunlight will quickly heat the water and promote rapid bacteria and algae growth.
- Empty the unused feeder solution every two or three days during the summer, clean the feeder well, and refill it with a fresh batch of sugar solution.
- Hummingbirds appear attracted to small pools of pure water. They are too small for birdbaths but will enjoy gentle sprinkler fountains or droplet-covered leaves. Here, they can get a drink of pure water and a refreshing shower or bath on hot summer days. Hey, who doesn't enjoy that experience!
- Allow some aphids or other tiny insects and spiders to remain on your flowers or leaves. Nectar is necessary for hummingbird energy requirements, but they also need an abundance of small bugs for protein, minerals, and vitamins.

Feeding developing chicks with small bugs is of utmost importance for these birds.

- Avoid spraying insecticides and fungicides on your flowers. Residual chemicals on the flowers and within the nectar will harm hummingbirds and possibly cause their death. If you have a severe infestation of pests, spray soapy water on the flowers, stems, and leaves in the late evening. Wait ten minutes before thoroughly washing off the soap and dead bugs. For fungal problems, spray a concentrated baking soda solution on the plants. After a half-hour, rinse off the affected areas. Repeat each evening until the fungal symptoms ease or disappear.
- Practice flower garden hygiene by weekly dead-heading spent flowers and removing diseased or dead plants. Removing spent flowers stimulates the development of new flowers throughout the summer — depending on the annual or perennial plant.
- Instruct the neighborhood kitty cats to leave the hummingbirds alone. The stray cats ignore my passionate pleas of temperance. Give them a dish of cat food to divert their attention from the hummers and satisfy their hunger. The cats and birds will thank you.

Conclusion

When I began typing this ebook, my principal objective was to highlight those garden flowers that easily attract hummingbirds. I think I have successfully done so, but as I look back on my words, I neglected to state why we should attract them. I suspect the simplistic answer is that they are so fascinating to watch. Birds attracted to bright, colorful flowers? Sucking the sweet nectar out of a blossom? We expect butterflies and bees to do this — but a bird? They act not as a bird while still looking like one.

There are more fascinating details about these birds that boggle the mind. Here are a generous number of amazing facts about these winged wonders:

- That humming sound is from the incredible 80 wing flaps per second, depending on the species. A bird's heart rate, while flying, is medically unheard of. How such a blood-pumping organ can function at such beating speed is amazing.
- Nature constructed their lives for flying, only using their tiny, stick-like legs for perching. They cannot walk or hop like most other birds.
- The average weight of an adult is less than that of a US penny coin. The smallest one, the Bee Hummingbird, native to Cuba, is nearly two inches long.
- Being so small, all hummingbirds spend energy so fast they need to replenish the calories with high-energy flower nectar almost every minute during the day — rain or shine.
- In the evening and during the night, these birds undergo a physiological process called torpor, a temporary hibernation to lower all biological functions to a point just above death. By morning, the process reverses, and they “wake up” for a new day of constant flying and feeding.
- Speaking of feeding, your average hummingbird needs to visit hundreds of high-producing nectar-filled flowers each

day. They soon learn to avoid flowers that produce little or no nectar.

- Unlike most birds, hummers can fly in any direction — including backward — and hover stationary while sipping flower nectar.
- Their long tongues sip or lap nectar about 15 times per second.
- Like most birds, these avian dynamos lack a sense of smell but have acute color vision, especially attracted to red.
- Unlike most birds, hummers are solitary travelers and don't flock.
- Like most birds, hummingbirds do “chirp” but in a rapid squeaky sequence. Some hummers provide courtship display sounds with their wing and tail feathers.
- Most hummingbird plumage is iridescent — the feathers scatter light wavelengths to display shimmering colors.
- These birds make nests like other birds but are smaller and made of spider web silk and lichens for camouflage. On average, most hummers lay two white, jellybean candy-sized eggs. The smallest species lay coffee bean-sized eggs.

I can go on and on with more amazing facts about these birds, but I'll stop here. Too many facts spoil the magic and brilliance of these avian wonders. Let's appreciate their grandeur among the colorful splendor of our garden flowers.

You will never grow tired of admiring these “flying jewels” kissing your garden flowers!

Thank you for reading this ebook.

I hope you have enjoyed reading this ebook about growing fabulous garden flowers that attract hummingbirds to your home and garden. Not only do these flowers offer outstanding beauty, but they also add excitement when these birds arrive to drink their life-sustaining nectar.

My other ebooks also list garden flowers you may wish to grow in your garden, which attract these birds and a kaleidoscope of butterflies.

Please visit my author website of <https://gedwinvarner.com> concerning these and other ebooks along with contact information.

About the Author

G. Edwin Varner grew up on a farm helping his father in the crop fields and assisting his mother in the flower and vegetable gardens. This early experience and learning led him to receive a Bachelor of Science degree in Biology with a minor in Botany.

For twenty years he successfully owned and operated a fragrant flower mail-order nursery. Unlike most mail-order nurseries publishing colorful but expensive pictorial catalogs, his frugal catalog extensively described the flowers he grew. He once said, "I write a thousand words worth a picture in my catalogs." Today, he has the same style of writing (thankfully with fewer words) through a variety of enjoyable and informative ebooks. This time, the ebooks include color photos of each flower.

He encourages you to cultivate something unique and beautiful in your gardens. His motto is "read about it, see it, grow it, and enjoy it!"

G. Edwin Varner lives in a rural area of northeastern Ohio, USA.