

April 3, 2019



Gardening for Hummingbirds
By Debbie Hager
UCCE Master Gardeners of El Dorado County

A hummingbird habitat requires areas of food sources, water, lookout perches, shade, shelter, nesting materials and nesting sites. Flowers that produce lots of nectar and also attract tiny insects are the most appealing to hummingbirds. Hummingbirds act as pollinators for the plants they rely upon, and are an essential bird pollinator for flowers in North America.

Hummingbirds need to bathe and are resourceful in using water sources that match their size. They prefer moving water and are fond of flying through the spray of lawn sprinklers. A bird bath may be used if shallow enough for the bird to stand in. Having a place from which they can survey their territory is essential. Hummingbirds prefer a perch that directly overlooks the flowers on which they feed. Male hummingbirds will rest and perch anywhere from exposed branches to clotheslines. Females and immature birds seek shade and the protection of foliage. Hummingbirds seek dense foliage for shelter from the elements and for roosting at night. The ideal light/shade balance for a hummingbird habitat is half full sun, a quarter partial shade and a quarter full shade.

Hummingbirds also need nesting sites and nesting materials. They nest in both deciduous and evergreen trees anywhere from four to fifty feet up, but most frequently in the ten to twenty foot high range. Most hummingbird nests contain downy plant fibers held together with spider silk and coated on the outside with lichens. The nests are only one to one and a half inches in diameter.

The goal is to have some hummingbird flowers in bloom at all times that hummingbirds might visit your garden. You can select combinations of annuals, perennials, flowering shrubs and vines. Consider planting species that are native to El Dorado County. Natives are good nectar producers. Hummingbirds like many types of flowers, not just red tubular ones, and the flowers attract insects that are an essential part of a hummingbird's diet. Hummingbirds do not

April 3, 2019

instinctively prefer red flowers over others, but with experience, they learn that red tubular flowers often contain the most nectar. The hummingbird's long bill and long tongue are able to reach the nectar in long, thin tubular flowers. Group the plants in the garden so that their blooms are easily accessible to hummingbirds, with ample room for hovering and ease of flight. Plant flowers of different heights with the tallest in back. The goal is to provide hummingbirds easy access to all flowers.

To provide blooms in late winter and spring consider planting Coral Bells (*Heuchera spp.*), Columbine (*Aquilegia spp.*) and Foothill Current (*Ribes malvaceum*). For summer blooms, height, nest materials and shelter plant Desert Willow (*Chilopsis linearis*). There is a beautiful Desert Willow at the Sherwood Demonstration Garden. For red summer flowers plant Hummingbird Sage (*Salvia spathacea*). Hummingbird fall favorites are California Fuschia (*Epilobium canum*) and Mexican Bush Sage (*Salvia leucantha*).

The final consideration for a hummingbird garden is to avoid using pesticides because the birds can ingest poison when they eat insects. Systemic herbicides (those absorbed by the roots or foliage and move through all parts of the plant) can also migrate to flower nectar.

Join UCCE Master Gardener Mike Pavlick for our upcoming class, "Gardening in Small Spaces" on April 10, from 9:00 a.m. to noon, at the Cameron Park Community Center, 2502 Country Club Drive.

For more information on the UCCE Master Gardeners of El Dorado County, see our website at <http://mgeldorado.ucanr.edu>. Master Gardeners are available to answer home gardening questions Tuesday through Friday, 9:00 a.m. to noon, by calling [\(530\) 621-5512](tel:5306215512), or send us an email using the Ask a Master Gardener option on our website. Walk-ins are welcome at our office, located at 311 Fair Lane in Placerville. We also encourage you to visit us at the Sherwood Demonstration Garden, 6699 Campus Drive in Placerville, behind Folsom Lake College, El Dorado Center. See http://mgeldorado.ucanr.edu/Demonstration_Garden for more information and days and hours of operation, or call us to schedule a tour. To sign up for notices and newsletters, see http://ucanr.edu/master_gardener_e-news. Master Gardeners are also on Facebook and Instagram.