

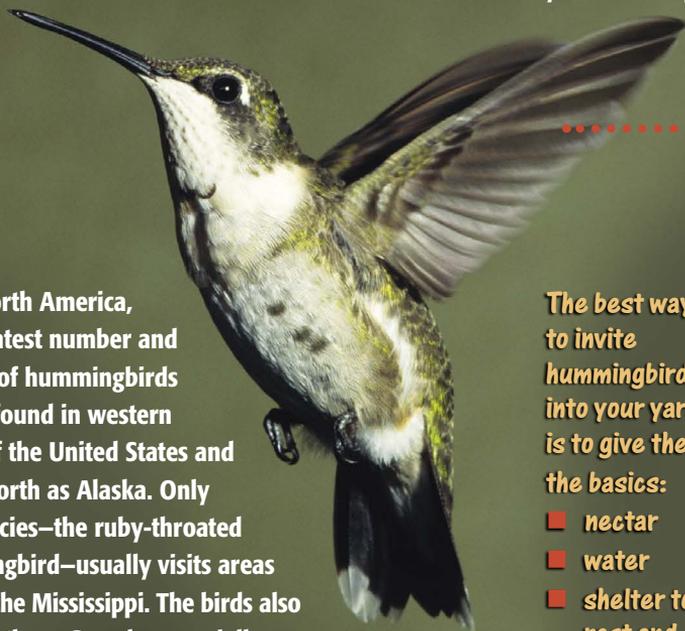
Hooray for Hummingbirds!

Invite these tiny birds into your yard.

Hummingbirds are all-American birds. They exist only in South, Central, and North America—nowhere else in the world. Altogether, there are 339 species of hummingbirds. In the spring, 21 species fly thousands of miles northward from Mexico, Costa Rica, and other southern places to visit the United States and Canada. In the fall, they return to their southern homes.

■ *A hummingbird has a tongue that is twice as long as its body.*

Although hummingbirds usually weigh less than an ounce, these tiny birds have a lot of energy. When the wind blows in the direction that they are flying, they can travel up to 50 mph.



..... a female ruby-throated hummingbird

In North America, the greatest number and variety of hummingbirds can be found in western areas of the United States and as far north as Alaska. Only one species—the ruby-throated hummingbird—usually visits areas east of the Mississippi. The birds also visit southern Canada, especially British Columbia, Alberta, and Nova Scotia.

The best way to invite hummingbirds into your yard is to give them the basics:

- *nectar*
- *water*
- *shelter to rest and maybe to nest*

continued

Hummingbirds' favorite food is nectar. This can be sugar water that you make or the sweetness of live flowers. Because these birds hover while they eat, flapping their wings at 80 beats per second, they prefer flowers that stand clear of other plants. The birds can feed more easily from some flower shapes than others:

deep, tubular flowers such as columbine or honeysuckle, into which the hummingbird can dip its beak

daisylike flowers such as Mexican sunflowers and zinnias because the yellow "button" in the middle is actually dozens of tiny nectar drinks

flower spikes such as gayfeather, penstemons, and salvias

Just as important as the shape of the flower is its color. Hummingbirds are strongly attracted to red, orange, pink, and blue.

Nectar for a Feeder

YOU WILL NEED:

- 2 cups water
- ½ cup granulated white sugar

Put the water into a pan and bring it to a boil on the stove. (Ask an adult for help.) Turn off the heat and add the sugar. Stir until the sugar dissolves. Cool the sugar water, then fill your bird feeder.

➔ (Do not use honey in your feeder. It can give a hummingbird a tongue fungus.)



Make a Feeder

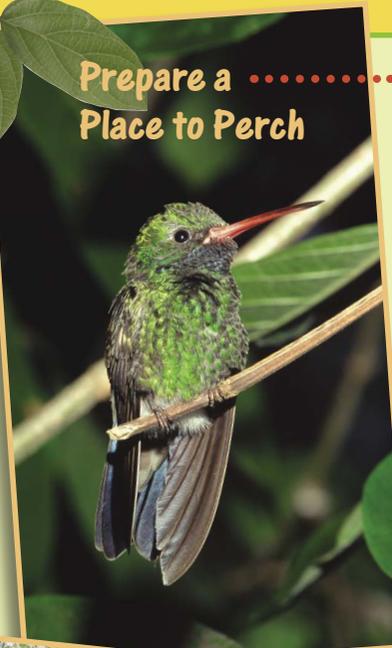
Recycle a clean plastic soda bottle. Check a bird supply store or search the Web for "soda bottle feeder" and purchase a screw-on base feeder and hanger made specifically for attaching to the soda bottle.

➔ If you buy a regular feeder, avoid one with yellow color.

Wasps are attracted to yellow.



Prepare a Place to Perch



The long flights and wing beating can make a hummingbird weary. As often as every 15 minutes, they look for a place to rest on trees and shrubs with small leaves. Particular plants include birch trees, butterfly bushes, and honey locusts. Don't worry if you do not have these plants in your yard—your hummingbird might also rest on your feeder's hanger.



Give a Bird a Bath

Set your garden hose to make a fine spray of water in one direction. Prop it to aim into the air. Watch—and listen—for hummingbirds dancing and singing in the shower.



Host Hummingbirds in a Garden

If you do not have the space to make a garden at home, talk to your teacher about planting these flowers at school or join with a friend or neighbor who would also enjoy having hummingbirds around.

Start small, with a few plants and a feeder. Add a plant or two each year. The plants will get bigger each year, and, before long, the hummingbirds will find them.

In addition to the flowers and plants mentioned, try these perennials:

Flowers

Bee balm
Cardinal flower
Coral bells
Dahlias
Daylilies
Delphiniums
Foxgloves
Hollyhocks
Hostas

Lupine

Maltese cross
Phlox
Speedwells

Vines
Cypress vine
Honeysuckle
Trumpet vine