

# Flowers that entice hummingbirds



*Salvia* 'Amistad' is a longtime favorite with huge violet flowers that the hummingbirds just love. PHOTO BY ELAINE JERAULD

**T**here is not much to dislike about hummingbirds in the garden, and many gardeners will select plants that specifically, when flowering, will attract them. Gardeners often refer to these plants as “hummingbird magnets,” because their flowers will reliably attract hummingbirds throughout the blooming season.

In the summer, there is a large diversity of plants to choose from. Many gardeners are familiar with some of the summer mainstream hummingbird magnet plants. A closer look at some of those options will clearly explain why they are so attractive to hummingbirds.

Hummingbirds are often active around hanging fuchsia baskets. The major assumption is that it is the flowers that attract them, probably because most fuchsias have brightly colored flowers. This assumption is correct, and they will seek nectar from a wide assortment of colored flowers.

It has also been noted that they only go after flowers with a tubular shape, and while this may be a preferred option, they have been seen on many flowers that are not tubular. Another tubular flower that they are extremely attracted to is *Cuphea*.

This is a great plant for growing in a pot in a sunny location. These plants will be covered with flowers and hummingbirds all summer.

The various potted plants on our deck encourage hummingbirds. It is a delight to watch them dart from flower to flower in search of nectar. It is also amusing to watch how they carefully guard their territory and will suddenly appear, almost as if out of nowhere, if another bird enters their space. They make it very clear that they are guarding their territory, and it is private property!

The many cultivars of *Salvia* have long been a favorite of hummingbirds. Two of my favorites are *Salvia guaranitica* ‘Black and Blue’ and S. ‘Amistad’. The flowers on ‘Amistad’ are more purple as compared to ‘Black and Blue’, which as the name would indicate has both black (dark purple) and blue flowers.

Both of these *Salvia* selections begin blooming in early spring and continue well into the fall. Here in the Willamette Valley, they often overwinter and reappear the following spring. Those plants that do overwinter tend to bloom later in the spring and I always select some blooming plants



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and mix them in with those that have overwinter in order to provide instant color and food. There are many non-traditional hummingbird attractant perennials as well as some trees and shrubs that we may not often consider. Probably the most well-known shrub for hummingbirds is our own native Oregon grape, (*Mahonia aquifolium*), and its many cultivars.

The cultivar ‘Arthur Menzies’



## What I'm Hearing

is well known, a prolific bloomer and readily available. With clusters of bright yellow flowers during the late fall and early winter months, *Mahonia* provide a much-needed food source when there may not be much to choose from. The many available cultivars offer gardeners varying choices to select a height appropriate for their gardening space.

While hostas are not known for their hummingbird attractant abilities, they are a nectar source when the hostas are blooming. For those gardens that are shaded, hostas in flower would be an ideal plant for attracting hummingbirds.

Another native plant that is a good early-season food source for hummingbirds is *Ribes sanguineum*, aka red flowering currant. Its native range includes the coastal mountains in California, Oregon, Washington and British Columbia.

This multi-stemmed shrub can thrive



The flowers of seven-son or *Heptacodium miconioides* attract hummingbirds and appear in the late summer and early fall, providing food late in the season. PHOTO BY ELAINE JERAULD

with some shade especially in the summer. It is primarily known for having red flowers but there are also pink and white forms. The flowers appear as drooping clusters and are followed by blue-black fruit which are a food source for other

birds later in the season.

We do not often think of trees as providing a source of nectar for hummingbirds but *Heptacodium miconioides*, called seven-son flower even though it is a tree or large shrub, is an exception to the rule. Not only are the creamy white flowers attractive to hummingbirds, but the flowers appear in late summer and early fall and provide food late in the season.

This deciduous tree has not been widely known but is becoming increasingly popular. The flowers are not only a good source of nectar for hummingbirds but for other insect pollinators in the fall.

We are fortunate to have such a variety of plants that provide a food source for attracting these tiny birds. Whether your space is limited to a deck, or patio, or a large garden, there are plants to accommodate hummingbirds.

If your plants are in containers, it is nice to have some of them placed where they are visible through a window. Many garden centers have special sections to showcase selected plants that will attract not only hummingbirds but also butterflies and other beneficial insects. More garden centers should take advantage of this opportunity to not only suggest great plants, but to also provide sustenance for hummingbirds.

The listing of plants mentioned here is only small sampling of hummingbird magnet plants and the garden centers could certainly capitalize by stocking many more. What a great way to help gardeners, the industry and the avian community. ©

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