

# HINTS for FEEDING HUMMINGBIRDS

by Bill Hilton Jr.

Operation RubyThroat: The Hummingbird Project

1432 DeVinney Road, York SC 29745

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www.rubythroat.org & www.hiltonpond.org



## HUMMINGBIRD NECTAR RECIPE (4:1)

- Pour **four cups of very hot tap water** into a large pot or pan (glass, enamel, or stainless steel—not aluminum)
- Add **one cup of table sugar** (NOT honey, artificial sweeteners, or sugar substitutes); **stir** until all sugar has dissolved
- Cover the pan, place on a hot burner, and bring mix to a rolling boil for **one minute**; do not let water evaporate (if you do, the mix can get too concentrated); boiling isn't necessary if the birds are draining the feeders every day or two
- Let the mix **cool** and pour it into well-cleaned feeders
- Store excess mix in the refrigerator but check for mold; let mix warm to room temperature before filling feeders
- Red food coloring is unnecessary, especially since most feeders are red; food coloring available in grocery stores apparently is NOT harmful to humans or to hummingbirds

## MISCELLANEOUS NOTES (see www.rubythroat.org)

- To attract early migrants, put a feeder up by **mid-March** in the southern U.S., by **1 April** in northern states
- Fill feeders only **halfway** early in the season or when hummingbirds don't drain the feeder between cleanings
- Clean and refill feeders at least **twice a week** in hot weather
- A mild solution of chlorine bleach may be used once a month to kill mold in dirty feeders
- Use **two or more** feeders, putting each where birds at one feeder can't see the other
- Several smaller 8- or 16-ounce feeders are far better than one or two really large ones unless you have many birds
- Maintain feeders all spring and summer; take most down by 1 October, but leave one up until Thanksgiving (or after if you can keep the mix fresh and keep it from freezing); stray hummingbirds from the west may wander in and stay all winter; **leaving feeders up will NOT influence when healthy hummingbirds migrate south**
- If you go on vacation or miss a week putting out feeders, don't feel sorry for the birds; hummingbirds know other food sources for up to a mile in all directions
- Hang feeders in the **shade** when possible—this makes them less attractive to bees and keeps the sugar water from spoiling so quickly—but put them in full view of a window, especially one near your breakfast or supper table!
- Don't worry if hummingbirds spend a lot of time drinking sugar water; they also visit flowers for natural nectar and small insects and spiders; it is unnecessary to buy fancy prepared mixes with vitamins and other additives
- Do NOT use insect spray to keep bees and wasps away from feeders; a shallow saucer of sugar water in the sun often lures insects away from the feeders; besides, insects are a natural part of the nectar-eating world

If you live east of the Mississippi River and see a hummingbird between **15 October & 31 March**, or an unusual hummingbird at any time, immediately contact Bill Hilton Jr. via **research@hiltonpond.org** or (803) 684-5852

If you—or you and your students if you are a teacher—are interested in participating in Operation RubyThroat:

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