



Wetlands & Wildlife Care Center

21900 Pacific Coast Highway

Huntington Beach, CA 92646

(714) 374-5587

How to care for hummingbird feeders (Please don't kill with kindness)

Proper care of Hummingbird feeders takes a significant commitment on your part, so please consider this before you start. **Please Note:** If you do not follow these instructions, you could be responsible for giving Hummingbirds a **serious and deadly fungus infection**. This fungus condition causes their tongues to swell, making it impossible for the Hummingbird to eat. Ultimately, they die of starvation, a slow and painful death. **Please do it right or don't do it at all.**

WHAT DO HUMMINGBIRDS EAT?

The Hummingbird diet consists of small soft body insects (aphids, gnats, small spiders, small fruit flies that feed on rotten fruit, etc.) and nectar from flowers which is mostly sucrose. When you put up a feeder, you are providing them an easy access to only the sucrose part of their diet. This is very important when flower nectar is in short supply.

SELECTION OF FEEDER – Purchase a feeder that has no hidden areas. Be sure all the inside surfaces can be reached and cleaned with a bottle brush (this will eliminate many types).

Feeder food – Sugar water prepared as below:

One (1) Part White Sugar

Do not boil sugar

Four (4) Parts Boiled Water

Re-measure after boiling

Cool to room temperature and then fill feeder

The above ratio approximates the sugar to water ratio present in the nectar of Hummingbird flowers. Too much sugar is hard on their liver and kidneys. Too little sugar will not provide the needed calories and may cause them to lose interest in your feeder.

Do not use

- Red Dye
- Commercial Hummingbird food
- Honey or artificial sweeteners
- Anything other than the one to four sugar water mixture described above.

Hanging the feeder – You can use a piece of coat hanger to hang the feeder. Apply Vaseline to the hanger if you have an ant problem. Hang the feeder in the shade where the Hummingbirds are safe from cats.

Maintain feeder cleanliness – You will need to wash the feeder out in very hot water every two to three days. Use a bottle brush to scrub all surfaces then rinse well. In hot weather, above 60 degrees, clean and change feeder every 2 days. Hummingbirds put their tongues into the feeder to drink and sugar water is a good medium for the growth of pathogens. If you see any mold in the feeder or the mixture becomes cloudy, then it was left up too long (you blew it). Remember, if it is not clean enough for you to drink from then your feeder is not fit for these delicate little Hummingbirds. **Proper maintenance of feeders needs to be strongly emphasized.** The Wetlands & Wildlife Care Center's Hummingbird rescue team rehabilitates hundreds of hummingbirds of which 10% or more of those received have fungus infections from improperly maintained feeders. These include sick adults or the sick babies of dead or about to die mother Hummingbirds. Unfortunately, not all of them make it. Because of their diet, treatment of *candidiasis* in Hummingbirds is extremely difficult.

Fruit and flowers – You can put out spoiled fruit in a plastic bucket, which will draw small gnat and fruit flies. You can get Hummingbird flowers and/or seed mixture from your nursery. Always consider the cat problem and hang where cats can't pick off the Hummingbirds (they get very good at doing that).

You found a hummingbird – Put it in a shoebox on crumpled Kleenex. Put a pencil size hole in the cover, cover the box and keep it warm and quiet. Specialized care and diet is required for captive Hummingbirds. Please call (714) 374-5587 option 5, then option 9 for detailed information and get it to one of our Hummingbird Rehab Team members as soon as possible.

Lisa (714) 381-3385 Melissa (714) 713-1149

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ABOUT HUMMINGBIRDS (In case you didn't know)

Hummingbirds are absolutely the most captivating species in the bird world. Even those who aren't into the bird watching scene will stop what they're doing to observe one of these winged jewels. For certain, hummingbirds have never gone unnoticed. For this reason, each year, the Wetlands & Wildlife Care Center's Hummingbird Rehabilitation Team receive nestlings that should have been left alone. The purpose of this ditty is to discourage nest tampering and prevent bird-napping. So please, please, please, leave the babies alone.

Hummingbirds are among our earliest nesters, starting in mid-January.

Hatchlings are about the size of a honey bee. For the first week of their lives they must be fed every 15 to 20 minutes for 14 hours a day. As they get older and stronger they can go as long as 45 minutes between feedings, but not without protest. When these little ones are placed into the Wetlands & Wildlife Care Center's care, the human volunteers are obliged to follow the same schedule.

Hummingbirds expend energy very quickly. They are always just a few hours away from starvation. But never fear, nature has installed a few backup systems to see these little guys through. *None of which is called the human hand.* Hummingbirds can lower their metabolism to a level below that of hibernation. It is called the torpid state. The body temperature drops from 104 degrees in the daytime to 51 degrees at night. When awake and active, their heart beats 1,200 times a minute, but at night the heart rate drops to 35 beats per minute. *Nestlings can go into torpor on cold wet days and remain that way until the weather warms and mother can resume foraging for food.*

Nestlings are never fed nectar by the mother, only very small insects. A hummingbird does all of the growing he'll ever do in about four weeks. So, proper diet is all important from day one. Commercial hummingbird feeder foods, sugar water, honey water, etc., have very little nutritional value and are harmful to an infant hummingbird.

Hummingbird nests are usually constructed of twigs at least 5 feet above the ground. The small cup shaped nest is reinforced with spider webs and lined with feathers and plant down. The young secure themselves to the nest by weaving their tiny toes around the nest fabric. So firm is their hold that if lifted from the nest, most often legs are left behind. *Please never attempt to remove from nest.*

The female builds the nest and rears the young alone. Therefore, time spent at the nest is minimal; after all she has herself and two others to feed. Indeed, she comes and goes very quickly. *Those that report the mother hasn't been at the nest for hours simply weren't watching close enough. If the babies are alive, they're being fed. If they seem to be begging (gaping) most of the time, that's what they do. So please, unless you find mom dead or clenched firmly between the cat's teeth, leave those babies be.*