



## ATTRACTING HUMMINGBIRDS TO NEW ENGLAND GARDENS

I have been gardening for hummingbirds and butterflies in Newbury, MA (zone 6) for the past ten years. Here are my “TOP 15” hummingbird nectar plants, roughly in order of bloom. Those underlined are staples which should be in everyone’s hummingbird garden.

- 1) RED AND YELLOW COLUMBINE *Aquilegia canadensis*. New England native usually in bloom when Ruby-throats arrive. Does well in most light conditions and soils except for very dry spots.
- 2) Bleeding Hearts *Dicentra spectabilis* is of European origin but larger than the native *D. eximia*. Other good early bloomers are Japanese quince, a shrub, and flowering maple and crabapple trees.
- 3) Penstemons All species, especially taller red types from the west such as *P. barbatus* and *P. palmeri*. They tend to die out after a while, however.
- 4) BEEBALM *Monarda didyma*, especially red, mildew-resistant varieties such as Cambridge Scarlet or Gardenview Scarlet. Native; likes moist soil.
- 5) CARDINAL FLOWER *Lobelia cardinalis*. Needs moist soil; mulch in winter.
- 6) Canna lilies-red; wild *Canna indica* is best. Dig tubers and store inside over winter.
- 7) SALVIAS- All the red New World species, especially *S. coccinea* and *S. splendens*. I like “Lady in Red” and “Texas Sage.” Easy from seed; treat as annuals.
- 8) HONEYSUCKLE – “Goldflame”, a native/Japanese hybrid which is very long-blooming, does the best in my conditions and hummingbirds love it. The native Coral Honeysuckle, *Lonicera sempervirens* is also good if you can grow it.
- 9) Red Buckeye *Aesculus pavia*., Small tree, native to southeastern US.
- 10) CYPRESS VINE and ‘Cardinal Climber’ *Ipomoea spp.* Lovely annual vines in the Morning Glory family. Start seeds inside in April, set out at end of May.
- 11) Spanish flag *Mina lobata*. Annual vine; blooms last through fall. Start seeds inside.
- 12) Butterfly bush *Buddleia* all types; not native, but not aggressive in our area.
- 13) Mexican sunflower *Tithonia rotundiflora*. The 6-foot ‘Torch’ variety is best.
- 14) Jewelweed *Impatiens capensis*. Native wildflower of wet areas; traditional nectar source for the fall migration.
- 15) TRUMPET VINE – *Campsis radicans*. Native. Blooms in August.

The following non-hardy nectar sources are VERY POPULAR! They are best in pots or baskets set out on deck or patio. I would not be without *Salvia guaranitica* , *Cuphea ignea* , and Shrimp Plant. Many of these can be overwintered inside in a sunny window.

**Brazilian Sage.** *Salvia guaranitica*. Blue, or black and blue flowers: hummers love it!  
**Shrimp plant.** *Justicia brandegeana*. A favorite in the southeast. Other *Justicias* also good.  
**Mexican cigar plant.** *Cuphea ignea*. The variety ‘David Verity’ is best. Use a large pot.  
**Fuchsias:** Older varieties with simpler flowers and fewer petals have more, and more accessible, nectar. The upright “Gartenmeister Bonstedt” is good.  
**Coral Plant.** *Russelia equisetiformis*. A cascade of red blooms ; a good pot plant.  
**Stachytarpheta spp.** ‘Red Compacta’ is best since it can be kept in a large pot.  
**Turk’s Cap.** *Malvaviscus arboreus*. Perennial in Zone 6b; here, keep it in a large pot.  
**Pineapple Sage?** (*Salvia elegans*) Usually blooms too late for our hummers; instead try **Salvia greggii** or **any** red or yellow tropical American salvia.  
Pentas; Lantana; *Bouvardia ternifolia* –these three also work.

There are many other plants that hummers will make use of. Try to have something in bloom at all times throughout the summer, from the first quinces, crabapples and columbines, to the last salvias, Spanish flag, and butterfly bushes.

Two excellent resources are Nancy L. Newfield and Barbara Nielsen, **Hummingbird Gardens**, Chapters Publishing Ltd, 1996, which is an inspiring tour of hummingbird gardens in each region of the nation, and Susan Day, Ron Rovanssek and Jack Griggs, **The Wildlife Gardener’s Guide to Hummingbirds**, A Cornell Bird Libaray Guide, HarperCollins, 2003. In addition, Sheri L. Williamson, **Hummingbirds of North America**, Houghton Mifflin, 2001, the premier field guide to hummingbirds, has a very good plant list.

### **SOURCES FOR HARD-TO-FIND HUMMINGBIRD PLANTS**

Select Seeds, CT [www.selectseeds.com](http://www.selectseeds.com) (also sells plants)  
Bustani Plant Farm, OK [www.bustaniplantfarm.com](http://www.bustaniplantfarm.com)  
High Country Gardens, NM [www.highcountrygardens.com](http://www.highcountrygardens.com) (Note that many western Agastaches and Penstemons are short-lived here in the acid, well-watered east.)  
Logee’s Greenhouses, CT [www.logees.com](http://www.logees.com) 1-888-330-8038  
New England Wild Flower Society, MA [www.newfs.org](http://www.newfs.org)

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