

California Native Plants that Attract Hummingbirds

Nevada and Placer County Region of the Northern Sierra Nevada

By planting the native wildflowers, shrubs, and trees upon which North American hummingbirds have depended for thousands of years, you will not only bring vibrant color to your garden, but you will also help to insure a brighter future for the birds that John James Audubon called “glittering garments of the rainbow.” Although various exotic flowering plants are attractive to hummingbirds, many of them invade neighboring fields and woodlands, crowding out more beneficial native shrubs and wildflowers. Also, cultivated hybrids often produce much less nectar than wild species.

The more closely your yard looks as if Mother Nature did the landscaping, the more likely it is that hummingbirds will make regular visits. The number of hummingbirds that frequent your yard is closely linked to the abundance of their four life-sustaining needs:

- **food**—75% nectar, 25% protein from small insects and spiders and some pollen,
- **water**—they love to zip through moving water, such as a birdbath fountain, mist sprayer, or garden sprinkler,
- **cover**—from predators and for nesting (as well as nesting materials), and
- **perches**—they spend 60–80% of each day perching, surveying their territory and dozing.

To best provide these needs, learn about local hummingbird habits and which species are likely to occur near your home. This knowledge will help you select plants that will bloom during the time that hummingbirds are likely to visit your yard. Nevada and Placer Counties host these species of hummingbirds:

- **Anna’s**—our only year-round resident; nests December to June in the foothills; current and gooseberry (*Ribes*) and manzanita (*Arctostaphylos*) flowers are key nectar sources in the early months of their breeding season.
- **Black-chinned**—nests April to August in lowland areas; willows (*Salix*) and sycamores (*Plantanus*) are key species; later in the season they may move up into foothills or lower elevations of mountain slopes.

- **Calliope**—smallest hummer normally found in the US; nests mid-May through July in high mountain forests and meadows, almost to timberline.
- **Rufous**—northward migration March through May (breeding grounds in Pacific Northwest to south central Alaska); southward, late June through September southeast through Sierra and Rocky Mountains, following seasonal blooming of flowers; California Fuchsia is a key species.

Flowers should be chosen for their ability to produce nectar, to grow well in your particular region, and to be in bloom when the hummingbirds need them. For the best results, plant patches of the same species (three or more plants) to provide larger quantities of nectar and to boost the color show (and to shorten flight distance).

Red flowers possess the highest attraction value because they cue hummingbirds to rich sources of nectar. A primary reason is that the red end of the color spectrum is not typically seen by nectar-seeking insects. Red also stands out the best against green foliage. It’s estimated that a hummingbird in flight can spot a red flower from half a mile away. Once red draws them into your garden, the little birds will visit a range of flower colors, especially those whose closely spaced blossoms allow them to move quickly from flower to flower. Hummingbirds also respond well to tubular flowers, a shape that deters insect access to the nectar.

If your flowers, shrubs, and trees don’t host bugs, then you won’t have birds. It’s that simple. Organic gardens are likely to host plenty of insects and spiders for hummingbirds to eat. Using pesticides around hummingbird plants is a very bad idea. In addition to killing the small insects that hummers rely upon for protein, the birds might directly ingest pesticides, which could sicken or kill them.

Spiders play another important role because hummers use spider silk to bind together the soft plant fibers out of which they build their tiny, walnut-half sized nests.

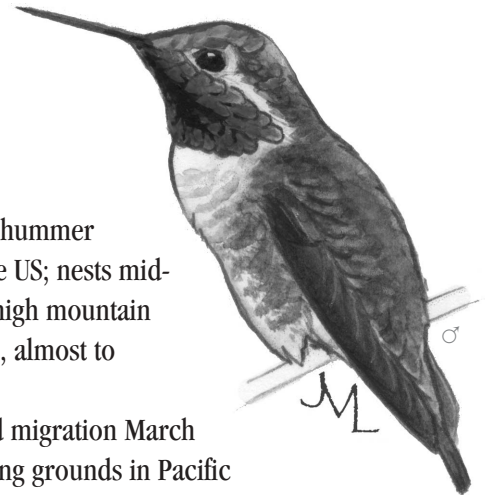


Illustration by and courtesy of John Muir Laws, ©2008
Anna's Hummingbird, *Calypte anna*

In general, all of the flowers that attract hummingbirds also attract other nectar and pollen seekers—butterflies, bees, other insects—to varying degrees. The fruits and seeds that result from the pollinated flowers then attract an array of other wildlife, from insects to birds to an assortment of furry critters, in addition to what goes into the soil seed bank for future generations of plants. Then there are the plants the leaves of which serve as browse, from deer to rabbits and other rodents to caterpillars (larvae) for butterflies and moths and many other insects. Larger plants, particularly shrubs and trees, serve as cover, roosting, and nesting sites. **Blooming Period:** This varies by elevation, site exposure, habitat, and weather for that particular year. The time span listed for each species roughly covers when it may start blooming at the low end of its elevation range to when it may finish at the upper end of its range. Individual plants may not bloom for the full time span listed. **Note:** *The number in parens following the blooming period notation is the page on which the plant is listed and described in the botanically ordered plant list. Plants are listed here in approximate bloom order.*

<i>Ribes malvaceum</i>	semi-evergreen shrub	<i>Castilleja exserta</i>	annual
Chaparral Currant	Dec–Mar (4)	Purple Owl’s Clover*	Mar–May (10)
<i>Ribes speciosum</i>	semi-deciduous shrub	<i>Ceanothus</i> spp.	
Fuchsia-flowering Gooseberry	Jan–Apr (5)	evergreen, prostrate to upright shrubs to small trees	
<i>Ribes sanguineum</i> var. <i>glutinosum</i>	deciduous shrub	Ceanothus, Wild or California Lilac	Mar–May (9)
Pink-flowered Currant	Jan–May (5)	<i>C. cuneatus</i> var. <i>cuneatus</i>	evergreen shrub
<i>Arctostaphylos</i> spp.		Buckbrush, Wedgeleaf Ceanothus*	Mar–Apr (9)
evergreen, mat-forming to upright shrubs and small trees		<i>C. lemmonii</i>	evergreen shrub
Manzanita Jan–Mar (lower) May–June (high country) (3)		Lemmon’s or Trinity Ceanothus*	Apr–May (9)
<i>A. mewukka, mewukka</i> ssp. <i>truei</i>	evergreen shrubs	<i>Lonicera hispidula</i> var. <i>vacillans</i>	
Indian, True’s Manzanita* (above 2,500’) Feb–Mar May–June		semi-evergreen, woody perennial vine	
<i>A. nevadensis</i>	prostrate, evergreen shrub, to 2’	Hairy or Wild Pink Honeysuckle*	Mar–May (2)
Pinemat Manzanita* (above 3,000’) Feb–Mar May–June		<i>Delphinium variegatum</i>	herbaceous perennial
<i>A. patula</i>	erect shrub, 3–7’	Royal Larkspur*	Mar–May (9)
Greenleaf Manzanita* (above 4,500’) Mar–Apr		<i>Salvia spathacea</i>	evergreen shrub
<i>A. viscida</i> ssp. <i>viscida</i>	erect shrub	Hummingbird Sage	Mar–May (6)
Whiteleaf or Sierra Manzanita* Feb–Mar (3)		<i>Clematis lasiantha</i>	woody, deciduous vine
<i>Aristolochia californica</i>	semi-deciduous, woody vine	Chaparral Clematis or Virgin’s Bower*	Mar–Jun (9)
Pipevine, Dutchman’s Pipe* Jan–Apr (1)		<i>Lupinus nanus</i>	annual
<i>Ribes viburnifolium</i>	evergreen shrub	Sky Lupine*	Mar–June (4)
Catalina Currant Feb–Apr (4)		<i>Lupinus succulentus</i>	annual
<i>Cercis occidentalis</i>	deciduous shrub/small tree	Arroyo or Succulent Lupine*	Mar–June (4)
Western Redbud* Feb–Apr (4)		<i>Collinsia heterophylla</i>	annual
<i>Cynoglossum grande</i>	herbaceous perennial	Chinese Houses*	Mar–July (10)
Grand Hound’s Tongue* Feb–May (2)		<i>Lupinus albifrons</i>	semi-evergreen, woody perennial
<i>Ribes roezlii</i> var. <i>roezlii</i>	deciduous shrub	Bush or Silver Lupine*	Mar–July (4)
Sierra Gooseberry* Feb–July (4)		<i>Silene californica</i>	herbaceous perennial
<i>Sisyrinchium bellum</i>	perennial	Indian Pink*	Mar–July (3)
Blue-eyed Grass* Feb–July (5)		<i>Dicentra formosa</i>	herbaceous perennial
<i>Dichelostemma capitatum</i>	perennial bulb	Wild Bleeding Heart*	Mar–July (8)
Blue Dicks* late Feb–May (7)		<i>Opuntia</i> spp.	perennial shrub to tree size
<i>Salix</i> spp.	deciduous shrubs and trees	Prickly-pear Cacti	Mar–Aug (varies by species) (3)
Willows Mar–Apr (10)		<i>O. basilaris</i>	woody perennial
<i>S. exigua</i> (Narrowleaf, Sandbar), <i>S. gooddingii</i> (San		Beavertail Cactus	Mar–July (3)
Joaquin), <i>S. laevigata</i> (Red), <i>S. lasiolepis</i> (Arroyo),		<i>Mimulus guttatus</i>	herbaceous perennial/annual
<i>S. lucida</i> (Shining), <i>S. scouleriana</i> (Scouler’s)		Seepspring Monkeyflower*	Mar–Sept (11)
<i>Gilia tricolor</i> ssp. <i>tricolor</i>	annual	<i>Solanum xanti</i>	herbaceous perennial
Birds-eye Gilia* Mar–Apr (8)		Purple Nightshade*	Mar–Sept (12)
<i>Triteleia lilacina</i>	perennial bulb	<i>Arbutus menziesii</i>	evergreen tree
Glassy Hyacinth or Brodiaea, Foothill Triteleia* Mar–Apr (7)		Pacific Madrone*	Apr (3)
<i>Berberis (Mabonia) aquifolium</i>		<i>Ribes aureum</i> var. <i>aureum</i>	deciduous shrub
var. <i>aquifolium</i>	evergreen shrub/thicket	Golden Currant*	Apr–May (4)
Barberry or Oregon-grape* Mar–May (2)			

* native to Nevada and Placer County region

<i>Cephalanthus occidentalis</i> Buttonwillow*	deciduous shrub Apr–May (10)	<i>Clematis ligusticifolia</i> Western Clematis or Virgin's Bower*	woody, deciduous vine Apr–Aug (9)
<i>Pickeringia montana</i> Chaparral Pea*	evergreen shrub Apr–May (4)	<i>Penstemon grinnellii</i> Grinnell's Beardtongue, Southern Woodland Penstemon	woody perennial Apr–Aug (11)
<i>Salvia mellifera</i> Black Sage	evergreen shrub Apr–May (6)	<i>Keckiella antirrhinoides</i> Yellow Bush Snapdragon, Climbing Penstemon	woody perennial Apr–Aug (10)
<i>Calochortus albus</i> Fairy Lantern, White Globe Lily*	perennial bulb Apr–June (6)	<i>Salvia clevelandii</i> Cleveland or Musk Sage	evergreen shrub Apr–Aug (6)
<i>Iris douglasiana</i> 'Pacific Coast Hybrids' Pacific Coast Iris hybrids	evergreen, herbacious perennial Apr–June (5)	<i>Geum triflorum</i> Prairie Smoke, Old-Man's Whiskers* (above 3,900')	herbaceous perennial Apr–Aug (9)
<i>Platanus racemosa</i> Western Sycamore	large, deciduous tree Apr–June (8)	<i>Chilopsis linearis</i> Desert Willow	deciduous shrub/small tree Apr–Sept (2)
<i>Calochortus luteus</i> Yellow Mariposa Lily, Gold Nuggets*	perennial bulbs Apr–June (6)	<i>Mimulus cardinalis</i> Scarlet Monkeyflower*	herbaceous perennial Apr–Oct (11)
<i>Ranunculus californicus</i> California Buttercup*	herbaceous perennial Apr–June (8)	<i>Aesculus californica</i> California Buckeye*	deciduous shrub/small tree May (5)
<i>Rhamnus ilicifolia</i> Hollyleaf Redberry*	evergreen shrub Apr–June (9)	<i>Lotus scoparius</i> Deer Weed*	evergreen, woody perennial May–June (4)
<i>Rhamnus tomentella</i> ssp. <i>tomentella</i> Hoary or Chaparral Coffeeberry*	evergreen shrub Apr–June (9)	<i>Delphinium cardinale</i> Red or Scarlet Larkspur or Delphinium	herbaceous perennial May–June (9)
<i>Cornus glabrata</i> Brown Twig Dogwood*	deciduous shrub/thicket Apr–June (3)	<i>Symphoricarpos albus</i> var. <i>laevigatus</i> Snowberry*	deciduous shrub/thicket May–June (3)
<i>Heuchera maxima</i> Island Alumroot	herbaceous perennial Apr–June (10)	<i>Penstemon heterophyllus</i> Foothill Penstemon*	woody perennial May–June (11)
<i>Triteleia laxa</i> Ithuriel's Spear, Wally Basket, Grass Nut*	perennial bulb Apr–June (7)	<i>Keckiella breviflora</i> Gaping Penstemon*	woody perennial May–June (10)
<i>Triteleia bridgesii</i> Bridges' Brodiaea*	perennial bulb Apr–June (7)	<i>Paeonia brownii</i> Western Peony* (above 4,000')	herbaceous perennial May–June (8)
<i>Dudleya cymosa</i> Canyon Dudleya, Live Forever*	perennial succulent Apr–June (3)	<i>Sarcodes sanguinea</i> Snow Plant* (above 4,000')	herbaceous perennial May–July (4)
<i>Lonicera involucrata</i> var. <i>involucrata</i> Twinberry*	deciduous shrub Apr–June (2)	<i>Iris missouriensis</i> Western Blue Flag* (above 3,000')	evergreen, herbacious perennial May–July (5)
<i>Penstemon eatonii</i> Firecracker Penstemon	woody perennial Apr–June (11)	<i>Calochortus venustus</i> Butterfly Mariposa Lily*	perennial bulb May–July (7)
<i>Lepechinia calycina</i> Pitcher Sage*	woody perennial Apr–June (5)	<i>Sidalcea malvaeflora</i> ssp. <i>asperella</i> Checkerbloom*	herbaceous perennial May–July (7)
<i>Keckiella lemmonii</i> Lemmon's Keckiella, Shrubby Penstemon*	woody perennial Apr–June (11)	<i>Agoseris grandiflora</i> California Dandelion, Large-flower Agoseris*	herbaceous perennial May–July (1)
<i>Cirsium occidentale</i> var. <i>californicum</i> California or Cobweb Thistle*	biennial Apr–July (1)	<i>Penstemon laetus</i> Gay Penstemon*	woody perennial May–July (11)
<i>Asclepias cordifolia</i> Purple Milkweed*	herbaceous perennial Apr–July (1)	<i>Penstemon azureus</i> Azure Penstemon*	low, woody perennial May–July (11)
<i>Gilia capitata</i> ssp. <i>capitata</i> Globe Gilia*	annual Apr–July (8)	<i>Clarkia unguiculata</i> Elegant Clarkia*	annual May–July (7)
<i>Sambucus mexicana</i> Blue Elderberry*	large, deciduous shrub/small tree Apr–Aug (2)	<i>Heuchera micrantha</i> Crevice Heuchera*	herbaceous perennial May–July (10)
<i>Penstemon centranthifolius</i> Scarlet Bugler	woody perennial Apr–July (11)	<i>Ribes nevadense</i> Mountain Pink Currant* (above 3,000')	deciduous shrub May–July (4)
<i>Erysimum capitatum</i> Western Wallflower*	herbaceous biennial/perennial Apr–Aug (2)		

<i>Lilium pardalinum</i> Leopard Lily*	perennial bulb May–July (7)	<i>Keckiella cordifolia</i> Heart-leaved or Red Climbing Penstemon, Straggly Keckiella	woody perennial June–Aug (10)
<i>Camassia quamash</i> Common Camas Lily*	perennial bulb May–July (7)	<i>Helenium bigelovii</i> Bigelow's Sneezeweed*	herbaceous perennial June–Aug (1)
<i>Mimulus (Diplacus) aurantiacus</i> “aurantiacus” Sticky Bush Monkeyflower*	evergreen, woody perennial May–July (11)	<i>Sidalcea oregana</i> Oregon Sidalcea, Mountain Hollyhock*	herbaceous perennial June–Aug (7)
<i>Mimulus (Diplacus) aurantiacus</i> “bifidus” Sierra Bush Monkeyflower*	evergreen, woody perennial May–July (11)	<i>Penstemon newberryi</i> Mountain Pride* (above 4,000')	mat-forming, woody perennial June–Aug (12)
<i>Asclepias speciosa</i> Showy Milkweed*	herbaceous perennial May–July (1)	<i>Penstemon speciosus</i> Showy Penstemon* (above 4,000')	woody perennial June–Aug (12)
<i>Salvia leucophylla</i> Purple Sage	evergreen shrub May–July (6)	<i>Salvia sonomensis</i> Creeping or Sonoma Sage*	evergreen groundcover June–Sept (6)
<i>Collomia grandiflora</i> Largeflower Collomia*	annual May–July (8)	<i>Hoita macrostachya</i> Large Leather Root*	herbaceous perennial June–Sept (4)
<i>Aquilegia formosa</i> Crimson or Western Columbine*	herbaceous perennial May–Aug (8)	<i>Delphinium nudicaule</i> Red Larkspur	herbaceous perennial June–Sept (9)
<i>Castilleja</i> spp. Paintbrush	herbaceous perennials May–Aug (10)	<i>Spiraea douglasii</i> Douglas' Spiraea*	deciduous shrub June–Sept (10)
<i>C. affinis</i> (Common*), <i>C. applegatei</i> (Applegate's*), <i>C. miniata</i> (Giant*), <i>C. pruinosa</i> (Frosty*)		<i>Monardella odoratissima</i> Mountain or Western Pennyroyal*	herbaceous perennial June–Sept (5)
<i>Penstemon rydbergii</i> Meadow Penstemon* (above 4,000')	low, mat-forming perennial May–Aug (12)	<i>Monardella villosa</i> Coyote Mint*	herbaceous perennial June–Sept (5)
<i>Rhododendron occidentale</i> Western Azalea*	large, deciduous shrub May–Aug (3)	<i>Mimulus lewisii</i> Lewis' Monkeyflower* (above 4,000')	herbaceous perennial June–Sept (11)
<i>Trichostemma lanatum</i> Wooly Blue Curls	evergreen shrub May–Aug (6)	<i>Triteleia ixioides</i> Prettyface, Golden Brodiaea*	perennial bulb June–Sept (7)
<i>Rosa californica</i> California Wild Rose*	deciduous shrub/thicket May–Aug (10)	<i>Ipomopsis aggregata</i> Scarlet Gilia, Skyrocket* (above 3,300')	biennial June–Sept (8)
<i>Stachys ajugoides</i> var. <i>rigida</i> Rigid Hedge Nettle*	herbaceous perennial May–Sept (6)	<i>Verbena hastata</i> Verbena, Blue Vervain*	biennial/perennial June–Sept (12)
<i>Calochortus superbus</i> Superb Mariposa Lily*	perennial bulb late May–July (6)	<i>Oenothera elata</i> Evening Primrose*	biennial June–Sept (8)
<i>Heteromeles arbutifolia</i> Toyon, Christmas Berry*	evergreen shrub or small tree June–July (9)	<i>Epilobium canum (Zauschneria californica)</i> ssp. <i>canum</i> (to 3' tall; drier) ssp. <i>latifolium</i> * (ground-hugging; moister)	herbaceous to woody perennial June–Oct (8)
<i>Lilium humboldtii</i> Humboldt Lily*	perennial bulb June–July (7)	California or Hummingbird Fuchsia	
<i>Philadelphus lewisii</i> Mock Orange*	deciduous shrub June–July (8)	<i>Lilium washingtonianum</i> Washington Lily* (above 3,500')	perennial bulb July–Aug (7)
<i>Sedum spathulifolium</i> Pacific Sedum, Common Stonecrop*	perennial succulent June–July (3)	<i>Epilobium angustifolium</i> ssp. <i>circumvagum</i> Red Fireweed* (above 3,500')	herbaceous perennial July–Sept (8)
<i>Sedum obtusatum</i> ssp. <i>obtusatum</i> Sierra Sedum or Stonecrop*	perennial succulent June–July (3)	<i>Lilium parvum</i> Alpine or Fairy Lily* (above 4,000')	perennial bulb July–Sept (7)
<i>Salvia apiana</i> White Sage	evergreen shrub June–July (6)	<i>Sagittaria sanfordii</i> Sanford's Arrowhead*	herbaceous perennial July–Sept (1)
<i>Scrophularia californica</i> California Figwort*	herbaceous perennial June–Aug (12)	<i>Delphinium glaucum</i> Mountain or Tower Larkspur* (above 6,000')	herbaceous perennial July–Sept (9)
<i>Symphoricarpos mollis</i> Creeping Snowberry, Trip Vine*	deciduous shrub June–Aug (3)	<i>Solidago californica</i> Western or California Goldenrod*	herbaceous perennial July–Oct (1)
<i>Symphoricarpos rotundifolius</i> var. <i>rotundifolius</i> Roundleaf Snowberry* (above 3,500')	deciduous shrub June–Aug (3)	<i>Lobelia cardinalis</i> Cardinal Flower	herbaceous perennial Aug–Oct (2)