



Hummingbirds of Florida

Hummingbirds live only in the Americas. Of the 338 species known, 16 are found in the United States and 3 occur in Florida. Black-chinned and rufous hummingbirds occasionally can be seen in Florida during the winter. The ruby throated hummingbird is by far the most common hummer in the state. It is about 3 inches long and weighs as little as a penny. The males' throat feathers contain air bubbles that give off an iridescent red tone in full light. Both sexes have metallic green backs and white-tipped tail feathers. The ruby-throat's breeding range extends from central Kansas to the east coast and from Saskatchewan to central Florida. Although, some birds may stay in south Florida year-round, most winter in Mexico and South America. Males arrive in Florida in March. Females follow them about a week later. Nesting in Florida begins in April. The nest is a walnut-size structure of plant down, adorned with lichens, moss, and bound with spider webs or fine plant fibers. Nests frequently are built over water. The female lays 2 eggs less than ½ inch long. After 20 days of incubation and 4 weeks of growing, young hummingbirds leave the nest. One of the most fascinating things about hummingbirds is their helicopter-like flying stunts. Not only can hummers suspend their bodies in midair, they also can fly backward, upward, even up-

side down. These maneuvers are possible because of a unique design that allows the wing to move very freely and in almost any direction at the shoulder. Soaring is the only maneuver they can not perform. Contrary to popular belief, hummingbirds do not hum. The sound is made by their rapid wing movements (50-200 beats per second). To acquire enough strength to support all of this high speed activity, hummingbirds need to consume large amounts of high energy food.

Adult hummingbirds feed primarily on nectar. Young are fed insects by their parents, but are switched to a mostly nectar diet by the time they leave the nest. Nectar is an energy-rich food that is used rapidly. One hummingbird may need nectar from hundreds of blossoms every day to maintain its body weight. Hummingbirds are well adapted to a liquid diet. Long needlelike bills and specially adapted tongues allow them to reach nectar in deep tubular flowers. They also feed to a lesser extent on insects.

For their size, hummingbirds have among the largest appetites in the bird world. They feed every 10 or 15 minutes from dawn until dusk. During this period, they eat more than half their weight in food and 8 times their weight in water. Hummingbirds have developed 2 adaptations to help them survive

the hours of darkness when they cannot feed. First, they eat as much as they can just before dark. During the night, their heart rate and body temperature drop to conserve energy. If they did not go into this sort of daily hibernation stage, they likely would starve. Artificial feeders will attract hummingbirds. However, feeders should not be the sole source of food provided. The sugar solution provides little nourishment. To keep hummingbirds around, you must garden for them. The ideal flower color is red, orange, or pink. Hummingbirds are not born with an attraction to certain colors but learn by trial and error which flowers give the best results. Because most nectar-bearing flowers within the range of the ruby-throat are red and orange, they quickly come to favor those colors. Tubular flowers are best because they hold large amounts of nectar at their base. Blooming season is another important gardening consideration. Nesting hummingbirds will need nectar from March to September. Your garden should have numerous nectar plants available throughout this time. It is best to plant a variety of species and to arrange these flowers in several groupings. Nesting hummingbirds are very aggressive and territorial around their food source. Having more than one flower garden will allow several hummers to feed at the same time without conflict.

Program Announcements

Top Ten Hummingbird Plants



Pineapple Sage,
Salvia elegans

Giant Blue Sage,
Salvia guaranitica

Cypress Vine,
Ipomoea quamoclit

Shrimp Plant,
Justicia brandegeana

Mimosa,
Albizia julibrissin

Shrub Verbena,
Lantana camara

Butterfly Bush,
Buddleja davidii

Rose of Sharon,
Hibiscus syriacus

Foxglove,
Digitalis purpurea

Cigar Plant,
Cuphea ignea

Source: www.rubythroat.org

Stormwater/ Landscape Program

Provide your neighborhood with information about proper landscape and pond maintenance practices that will protect Florida's natural waterways. St. John's River Water Management/WAVE Representative Paula Staples and Rebecca L. Jordi, University of Florida/IFAS Horticulture Extension Agent will come for a free consultation.

This program must have a minimum of ten participants.

Troubleshooting Florida Landscapes

Do you and your neighbors need a personal consultation on how to solve landscape problems? Are you concerned about your trees, shrubs, or lawngrass thriving? Rebecca L. Jordi, University of Florida/IFAS Horticulture Extension Agent and Nassau County Master Gardener Volunteers will come for a free group consultation.

This program must have a minimum of six participants.

Landscape Matters

Wednesday 10-11AM
March 14th
Perennials & Micro-irrigation
Trish Cramer
Paul Gosnell
Bea Walker

Wednesday 10-11AM
April 18th
Butterflies
Ginny Grupe

Demonstration Garden
96135 Nassau Place
Nassau County Govt.
Complex, Yulee

These programs are free to the public, so please call us at 904-548-1116 or 904-879-1019 or e-mail rljordi@ufl.edu if you plan to attend. If response is too small, the program will be canceled.

Invasive Plants - Cashmere Bouquet

Cashmere Bouquet (*Clerodendrum bungei*), otherwise known as Rose Glory Bower, Mexicali Rose, or Mexican Hydrangea, is a deciduous shrub with large dense pink bloom clusters of tubular flowers. When leaves or stems are rubbed or bruised they produce a musky scent. Flowering occurs continuously all summer and into fall. Each flower on this four- to six-foot upright perennial has a lovely perfume and attracts butterflies and humming birds. The plant

is named for Professor Alexander von Bunge, a 19th century Ukrainian botanist. Arriving by way of its native China, this member of the mint family is frost-hardy and easy to grow. Dead-head this plant through the summer for a repeating floral display. Take note that Cashmere Bouquet spreads by underground

runners, which make it quite an invasive beauty as it pops up throughout your lawn, but it is fairly easy to control. If you are aware of its habit and promptly remove sprouts from areas where you don't want them, this is not a problem. This is a Class II invasive on the Florida Exotic Pest Plant list. Visit the web site for more information: <http://www.fleppc.org/>



“To Do” List for March

Annuals: Water only as needed. Over-watering causes root and stem rot. Plant dianthus, petunias, and snapdragons.

Bulbs: These will be in full bloom. To conserve the plant’s energy, cut off the old seedpods after flowering.

Lawns: Rake dead grass to allow new grass to grow. Complete fertilizer can be applied this month. Select a fertilizer such as 15-0-15 with as much slow release nitrogen as possible.

Perennials: Fertilize this month if you missed last month. Plant poinsettias in landscape during late March to early April. Cut back plants to within 12 to 18 inches of ground level. Pinch back new growth every four weeks until September 10. Fertilize monthly from May to September. Plant lantana, pentas, salvias, purple coneflowers, buddleia, and verbenas.

Shrubs: Prune and fertilize azaleas with acid fertilizer as soon as they finish blooming. Azaleas may be transplanted now as well. Overgrown shrubs can be cut back down to 12-24 inches.

Trees: Make sure your younger trees maintain a straight trunk as new growth begins. Remove or prune (called a drop crotch cut) all limbs that may be competing with the central leader.

Vegetables: Have your soil tested prior to planting your seeds or transplants. The pH and the nutrient content of the soil is an important factor in production of vegetables. This month’s choices for planting are cantaloupes, watermelon and beans.



“To Do” List for April

Annuals: Annuals to plant now include celosia, coleus, coreopsis, dusty miller, geraniums, hollyhocks, impatiens, kalanchoe, lobelias, marigolds, portulacas, rudbeckias, salvia, verbenas, zinnias.

Lawns: Water when the leaves curl and turn gray-green. Water during early morning hours. Stop feeding during the very dry times. Set mower at the highest setting for your grass type. Sand may be applied to uneven areas of a lawn for leveling. It should not be more than 1 inch thick or it may damage the lawn. Recycle grass clippings. Removing the clippings carries off fertilizer that has been applied to the lawn.

Perennials: Divide overcrowded fall flowering perennials and bulbs. Bulbs to plant now include achimenes, agapanthus, amaryllis, Asiatic lilies, begonias, blood lily, caladiums, cannas, crinum, dahlia, gladiolus, gloriosa lily and zephyranthes.

Trees: Look for aphids, borers, and scale. Caterpillars may be heavy this month.

Vegetables: Herbs to plant are anise, basil, borage, chives, dill, marjoram, mint, oregano, rosemary, sage, savory, and thyme. Vegetables to plant include cantaloupe, collards, cucumbers, lima beans, okra, pumpkin, yams, peppers, squash and watermelon.



**UF/IFAS
Nassau County
Extension**

543350 US Highway #1
Callahan, FL 32011

Tel: 904-879-1019
Tel: 904-548-1116
E-mail: rljordi@ufl.edu

To receive this newsletter
in color via e-mail, contact
Rebecca Jordi at the above
e-mail address.

Visit us online at
<http://nassau.ifas.ufl.edu/>

Nassau County is proud to provide you with this information. Horticulture News is a joint project with contributions by county agents and Master Gardener Volunteers.

Sincerely,



**Rebecca L. Jordi,
Environmental Horticultural Agent II**

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Herb of the Month - Lemon Balm

Lemon balm (*Melissa officinalis* L.) is a lemon scented member of the Mint family. The fragrance of the plant is true to its name: citrusy and fresh. Brush the herb's leaves with your fingers, and they will smell of lemon with a hint of mint.

As far back as the ancient Greeks this plant was recognized for both its soothing smell and its medicinal properties. The roman scholar Pliny noted that bees preferred lemon balm to other plants. It was used as a treatment for bites, and given to patients to calm their nerves. Originally native to southern Europe and northern Africa, Lemon Balm is now cultivated throughout the world. Lemon balm is easy to grow from seed sown in the spring or early fall. The seed is very small and should be covered with only a fine layer of soil. Cuttings and root divisions, however, are faster and easier ways to establish lemon balm. Stem cuttings can be made from the vigorous summer growth or the roots can be divided in the spring or fall. Root cuttings should contain three to four buds each. In the fall, plant root cuttings early enough for the plants to become established before the first frost. When choosing a site, keep in mind that lemon balm self-sows freely, spreads rapidly and can quickly become a weed. Lemon balm should be harvested before it flowers for optimum fragrance. To harvest, cut off plant two inches above the ground. The leaves are best used fresh in cooking. It can be used with green vegetables, salads, poultry, lamb, and fish.

