

CARE AND MAINTENANCE OF HUMMINGBIRD FEEDERS

Once feeding hummingbirds becomes part of your backyard routine, it's necessary to keep the feeders clean. Consider how difficult cleaning the various styles will be when choosing feeders for your yard.

Clean feeders attract hummingbirds, as well as ensure the sugar-water mixture doesn't grow mold and bacteria that could hurt them.

CLEANING THE FEEDER COMPONENTS

The easier a hummingbird feeder is to clean, the more likely it will be cleaned properly and regularly. When selecting among feeder styles, note how easy each type is to take apart and get to all of the surfaces. Some are dishwasher safe. While convenient, washing them out by hand is OK, too.

Always clean feeders thoroughly before refilling them with sugar-water. Rinse them thoroughly with hot tap water. Scrub the interior with a small bottle brush to remove sugary residue and any black mold spots.

Schools of thought vary on what cleanser is best to use on the feeders. Some people use bleach and hot water. Others use soap and water, but soak the feeders in bleach. Still others contend vinegar and water is the safest for the birds. Choose the method that's most comfortable for your family.

THE SUGAR-WATER MIXTURE

Change the sugar-water solution often and throw away any leftover liquid each time the feeder is cleaned. Don't top off partially filled feeders or re-fill dirty, but empty, feeders.

To avoid waste, fill each feeder with just enough of the sugar-water to last a day or two. If the birds aren't eating all of it between cleanings, fill the feeders with the amount they are eating. Partially filling the feeders is a particularly good idea at the beginning and end of the hummingbird season as the birds arrive and depart.

When the liquid turns cloudy, it's fermented and has spoiled. The sugar-water can turn bad in as little as a day or two, depending on the outdoor temperature. It's also prone to growing mold that shows up as visible black spots in the feeder. In extremely hot weather, change the sugar-water every day. The best place for hummingbird viewing may be a sunny spot, but hanging some of the feeders in the shade can slow the growth of bacteria and mold.

KEEPING PESTS AWAY

Feeders filled with the sugary mixture can attract more than hummingbirds. They're also a magnet for other sugar-loving birds such as house finches, orioles and woodpeckers. While they're fun to watch, too, find other ways and places to feed them.

Additionally, it's not uncommon for pests such as ants, bees, and wasps to find the feeders.

Certain styles of feeders, particularly those that drip, attract insects more than other designs.

Feeders with moats that hold water keep the ants from reaching the sugar-water.

Other feeders are designed to keep bees and wasps away from the hummingbirds' liquid food. Bee guards are stoppers that prevent the bees and wasps from reaching the liquid, but still allow hummingbirds to feed through the small holes. Some feeders have the sugar-water level below where insects can get to it, while keeping it accessible for the hummingbirds.