At least 53 species of North American birds drink nectar—the naturally occurring sweet liquid produced by plants. Hummingbirds and orioles are the main nectar drinkers, but mockingbirds, grosbeaks, tanagers, and several warblers also enjoy sweet drinks from flowers and tree sap. You can bring these nectar-loving birds to your home with a few easy steps. Once they start visiting your garden, it’s likely some will stay the entire season and even return the following year.

About Audubon
The National Audubon Society saves birds and their habitats throughout the Americas using science, advocacy, education, and on-the-ground conservation. Audubon’s state programs, nature centers, chapters, and partners have an unparalleled wingspan that reaches millions of people each year to inform, inspire, and unite diverse communities in conservation action. Since 1905, Audubon’s vision has been a world in which people and wildlife thrive.

Visit Audubon online for more information and tips on creating a bird-friendly yard. www.audubon.org

Audubon Guide to Attracting Hummingbirds and Orioles

Small birds, big appetites
Hummingbirds and other nectar eaters are some of the most intrepid migrants—they can travel thousands of miles each year. To accomplish these remarkable feats, they rely on the abundant supply of nectar usually found within flowers that have co-evolved with nectar eaters over thousands of years. Although hummingbirds are the tiniest of vertebrates, they have the largest brain and greatest appetite of all birds their size. Hummingbirds must eat once every 10 to 15 minutes and visit between 1,000 and 2,000 flowers per day to sustain their supercharged metabolisms.

Like other migrants, nectar-drinking birds are also vulnerable to extreme weather, disease, and predators. In addition, climate change and development are causing habitat loss, and the birds are threatened by collisions with windows and cell towers.

Backyard gardens, large and small, provide sanctuary for resident and migrating nectar-eating birds. Sugar water feeders provide nourishment, but they are most helpful as a supplement to the natural nectar obtained from flowers. It’s best to create gardens that provide real flower nectar as part of a complete habitat that offers shelter, nesting places, and water.

It may take weeks after you’ve set out flowers and feeders before nectar-loving birds discover your new garden. But if you’re lucky, they’ll show up much faster—sometimes within moments!
Creating a hummingbird- and oriole-friendly yard

Flowers, feeders, perches, insects, and water are the key ingredients to a healthy yard that will attract these amazing jewels. Since hummingbirds and orioles naturally frequent openings in the forest and forest edges, they are readily drawn to suburban and rural gardens that offer a mix of tall trees, shrubs, meadow, and lawn. During migration, they frequent parks and urban yards planted with bright flowers.

START WITH A SKETCH OF YOUR YARD

Indicate the location of your home and outbuildings. Include trees, shrubs, flower beds, and other features that may benefit hummingbirds and orioles. Use your sketch to determine the best location for your nectar gardens. Hummingbird gardens need not be large—even a window box or hanging planter will do.

THINK VERTICALLY

Grow a cascade of nectar-rich plants by securing a trellis to your house and planting trumpet honeysuckle (Lonicera sempervirens) beneath it. Trees and garden sheds can also support sturdy trellises for trumpet vine (Campsis radicans). Layer herbaceous or lower-growing plants (see plant selections, opposite) in front of vines. Then add window boxes, tubs, or ceramic pots to create a terraced effect and provide growing places for a variety of nectar plants like Hamelia patens, cigar plant (Cuphea spp.), and justicias.

PROVIDE TREES AND SHRUBS

Hummingbirds and orioles use trees for perching and nesting. Large tree trunks may also provide a source of lichens, which many hummingbirds attach to the outsides of their nests with spider silk for camouflage. Hummingbirds usually nest in the forks of small, stiff tree branches; orioles favor the drooping branches of maples, poplars, willows, and conifers. If your garden does not include trees or shrubs, a dead branch with small perching twigs makes a good substitute. Locate these perches near your garden or sugar water feeders.

LEARN WHEN TO EXPECT YOUR LOCAL HUMMINGBIRDS

This will help you select plants that bloom when hummingbirds are most likely to visit and determine when to put out hummingbird feeders. Don’t worry that leaving feeders up too long will prevent hummingbirds from migrating on time; migration is triggered mainly by day length rather than food availability. In regions where winter freezes are rare, some hummingbirds and orioles may still visit your garden.

FAVOR NATIVE PLANTS

Learn which native plants hummingbirds feed on in nearby natural areas, and include these in your garden. Native plants and nectar-eating birds have a long association.

PROVIDE A WATER FEATURE

Pump-fed waterfalls. Orioles also prefer shallow water—generated by garden misters, drip systems, and small shallow water, and may preen or flit through the droplets. Provide a water feature. Hamelia patens, a good substitute. Locate these perches near your garden or sugar water feeders.

AVOID PESTICIDES

Birds can ingest poisons when they eat contaminated feeders. Avoid pesticides. Some plants may be killed by common insecticides. Use only those labeled safe for birds. If your yard contains a host plant for a pest, use neem oil to control it. Use a liquid soap to remove dead insects that build up on feeders. Scrub them with a bottlebrush to eliminate fungus. Likewise, do not use honey in feeders, as this can grow mold. Also avoid red food coloring—it is unnecessary.

AVOID PESTICIDES

Using feeders

This will help attract the birds until your garden flowers are flourishing and lure birds up close for better viewing. To prepare a sugar water solution, mix one part white sugar with four parts water. This will help attract the birds until your garden flowers are flourishing and lure birds up close for better viewing. To prepare a sugar water solution, mix one part white sugar with four parts water. To prepare a sugar water solution, mix one part white sugar with four parts water. This will help attract the birds until your garden flowers are flourishing and lure birds up close for better viewing. To prepare a sugar water solution, mix one part white sugar with four parts water. This will help attract the birds until your garden flowers are flourishing and lure birds up close for better viewing. To prepare a sugar water solution, mix one part white sugar with four parts water. This will help attract the birds until your garden flowers are flourishing and lure birds up close for better viewing. To prepare a sugar water solution, mix one part white sugar with four parts water. This will help attract the birds until your garden flowers are flourishing and lure birds up close for better viewing. To prepare a sugar water solution, mix one part white sugar with four parts water. This will help attract the birds until your garden flowers are flourishing and lure birds up close for better viewing. To prepare a sugar water solution, mix one part white sugar with four parts water.