Attracting hummingbirds to the landscape

While some gardeners plant flowers and shrubs just for the sheer beauty, others purposefully plant to attract different species of wildlife, including hummingbirds.

In Oklahoma, we typically see the ruby-throated hummingbird, which is easily recognized by its iridescent plumage. Although less common, you might also catch sight of a rufous hummingbird.

Not only are these fast-flyers fun to watch, hummingbirds also provide a service to the flowers as they feed. Pollen from the long stamens surrounding the flower tube collects on the hummingbird’s head or breast. The pollen transfers to the next flower the bird visits, pollinating the flower and helping ensure its reproduction.

The best way to attract hummingbirds to your landscape is to plant a variety of flowering plants that will come into bloom in succession throughout the season. This will provide the nectar the hummingbirds need to survive. One great choice for early season is red columbine, along with beepalm, which features bright red flowers. Beepalm is a perennial and blooms from late spring through early autumn.

Another popular plant that attracts hummingbirds is trumpet creeper. With its showy orange/red flowers, trumpet creeper blooms from early summer through September. Gardeners who choose to plant this should do so in an area that receives full sun. Also, it grows aggressively and is best placed along a fence where it easily can be trimmed.

Another fun way to attract hummingbirds to the landscape is to place feeders in your garden. Because hummingbirds can be territorial, it’s best to place several feeders throughout the landscape. The feeders hold a sugar-water mixture that easily can be mixed up at home. Simply mix four parts water with one part sugar. Boil the solution briefly to dissolve the sugar. Because the mixture is made of sugar, in hot weather it can go bad relatively quickly, so replace at least weekly to keep it fresh.

At one time, it was thought red food coloring needed to be added to the solution, but that isn’t necessary. In fact, it could be harmful. The red coloring on the feeder itself is enough to attract hummingbirds in search of food.

For more information about attracting birds to the landscape, check out Oklahoma State University Extension’s fact sheet, Landscaping and Gardening for Birds.

###