

## **FACT SHEET: Hummingbirds**

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I love these mini, colorfully delightful helicopters that I hear before I see! There are 338 species of hummingbirds which live only in the Americas. Of these, 16 are in the US and 3 in Florida. Their size ranges from 2 to 8 inches in length, and they have iridescent feathers. Contrary to their name, hummingbirds don't hum. The noise they make is from their fast wing movements, 50-200 beats per second! The most common hummingbird in Florida is the ruby-throated hummingbird which weighs less than a penny.

Hummingbirds have a high metabolic rate. Because of this, they need large amounts of high energy food. Their appetites are as large as they are small. Hummingbirds feed every 10-15 minutes from dawn to dusk. Their primary food groups are insects and nectar. Don't rely on artificial feeders as their only food source because the sugar solution doesn't provide the nourishment required.

They are attracted to brightly colored flowers (red, orange, and pink). I have even seen hummingbirds feeding from the white flowers on my Cat's whiskers (*Orthosiphon stamineus*) plants. Hummingbirds like a variety of plants year-round. To identify a few, they are attracted to the Bottlebrush tree, Firebush, Firespike, Trumpet and Cross Vines, Butterfly Milkweed, Shrimp Plant, Scarlet Morning Glory and Four O'Clock.

Hummingbirds are very interesting. Their heartbeat is from 250-1,200 beats per minute. They fly forward, backward, upside down and hover. Their flight speed is between 30-50 miles per hour. Hummingbirds are fiercely territorial; females less so than males. They have an extensive memory and are creatures of habit. Hummingbirds migrate over the Gulf of Mexico from late February to May and return mid-July to October.



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Grab a pair of binoculars, an iced tea and a chair and watch hummingbirds in your yard. For more information about Hummingbirds of Florida, the plants that attract them and their predators, access this University of Florida publication from which this article was adapted:

<http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/pdffiles/UW/UW05900.pdf>.

More gardening information is available at: <http://hillsborough.extension.ufl.edu> and <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu>. For horticultural assistance, contact the Hillsborough County Extension Office, 744-5519, or visit us at 5339 County Road 579, Seffner, FL 33584. Master Gardeners are available Monday through Friday from 8:00 am to 5:00 pm. We can help!