

Attracting hummingbirds — and customers

If there is one topic during the spring and summer that generates tremendous listener interest on my radio program, it is hummingbirds. Just mentioning the name will cause the phone lines to light up with callers eager to share their own stories of favorite plants that attract these magnificent creatures.

Creating a seasonal display of plants known to attract hummingbirds can also attract customers. It's something that an independent garden center can easily do, and it makes the garden center stand out from other stores that are selling exactly the same plants. It is

*What I'm
Hearing*

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Darcy**



an opportunity to be innovative, visually stunning and informative.

The financial investment for the garden center would be low because most of these plants would already be

in stock. The only things needed are an adventuresome imagination and some sweat equity.

Customers are hungry for all types of gardening information and inspiration. Oftentimes, they may not know exactly what they want. An attractive display can quickly help make up their minds.

Seeing hummingbirds drawn to the display may trigger the customers' desire for those types of plants. Most gardeners take great delight in having hummingbirds in their gardens and do whatever they can to encourage them. Presenting customers with an assortment of complementary plants may lead to greater sales.

Since many of the popular plants used for attracting hummingbirds are easy to grow in containers, a display of these plants can stimulate awareness among gardeners who have limited space, such as a deck or patio.

For my own garden, I always buy plants for their ability to act as a hummingbird "magnet." Following is a selection of plants I have found to be particularly attractive to hummingbirds.

Sure-fire *Salvia*

Several years ago, I would have said that bright red or orange flowers would be necessary to attract hummingbirds, but I have learned that this is not necessarily the case. While these hot colors are certainly attractive, hummingbirds are also immensely fond of purple and blue *Salvia*.

For many years on our deck, we have had at least one container of *Salvia* 'Black and Blue'. It is a non-stop bloomer all summer and into the fall. It is easy to grow, attractive in a pot and thrives in a sunny location. Of all the many plants in our garden and the container plants on our deck, it seems to be the hummingbird plant of choice.

Last year, for the first time, I tried *Salvia* 'Amistad' and found it to be very similar to 'Black and Blue' in its ability to attract hummingbirds. The differ- ▶



Sages such as *Salvia* 'Amistad' are hummingbird favorites. PHOTO BY DOUG BARRAGAR

ence between the two is that the flowers of 'Amistad' are a solid purple, whereas 'Black and Blue' flowers are blue.

Put fuchsias up front

Fuchsias are a well-known hummingbird attractant. They would be an ideal addition to a display because of their wide range of color choices and growth habits. A display should consist of several trailing types in baskets as well as the upright forms. Since most fuchsias would be in bloom come springtime, adding these plants to the display would make it very colorful.

Hummingbird mint

Agastache has become more readily available, and new types offer stronger stems and fuller flower heads compared to some of the older varieties. These improved attributes, combined with

broader availability, have resulted in their appearance in many home gardens.

With their fragrant foliage and profuse flowers, *Agastache* — aka “hummingbird mint” — makes an attractive addition to any garden. They are available in a wide range of colors, including red, blue, pink, purple and orange, as well as various shades of each. *Agastache* is also an excellent container plant.

Diversify your display

While hummingbirds may prefer tubular-shaped flowers, I have seen them go to an *Abutilon* flower and others with non-tubular shapes.

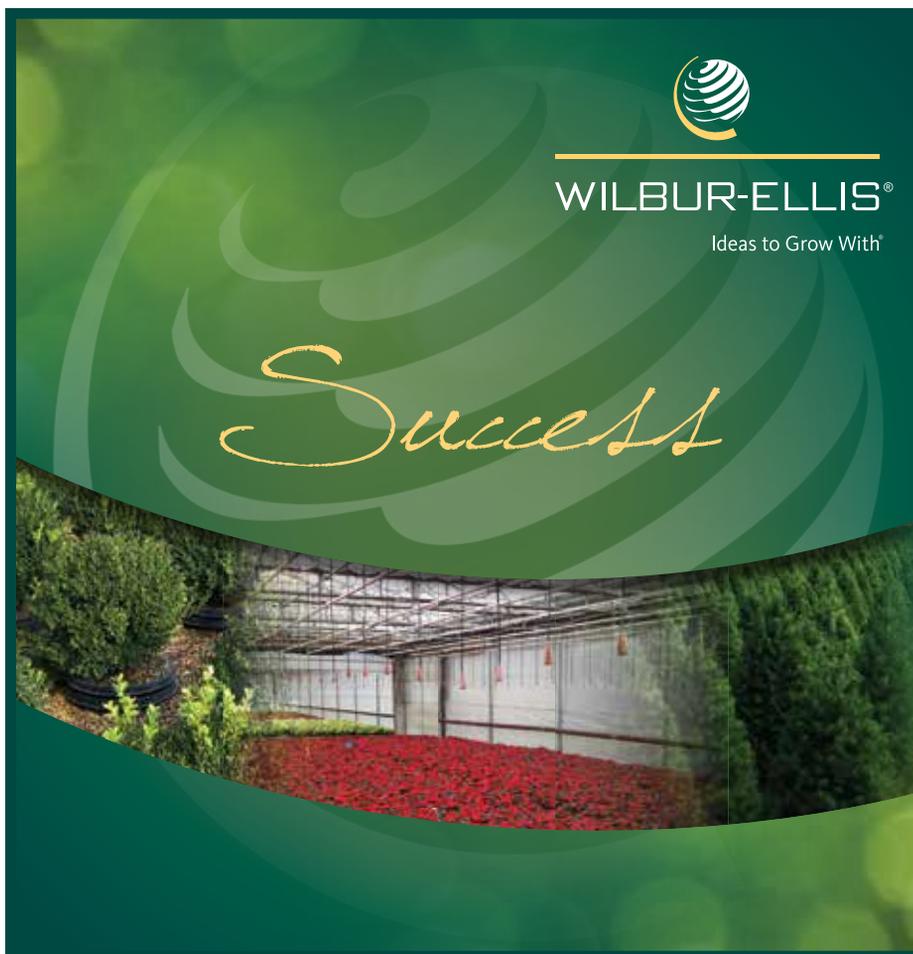
Other summer flowers that attract hummingbirds include *Agapanthus*, *Cuphea*, *Digiplexis*, *Iochroma* and *Nicotiana*. These plants would likely be available and flowering in early summer. Any of these plants could easily be

incorporated into a hummingbird garden display.

The display could also include bird-baths and other water features — hummingbirds absolutely love a reliable source of water. Of course, offering water features can also lead to extra sales.

It is important to present your customers with new ideas. Informative, attractive displays are an economical, easy way to accomplish that mission. Signage should emphasize the virtues of the plants and garden décor on display. Use color and variety to attract attention, and your display will act as a “magnet” for customers as well as hummingbirds. ☺

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