

It's easy to make your own hummingbird nectar, simply use a sugar solution that is 1 part sugar to 4 parts water. This ratio most closely mimics the concentration of sugar found in the nectar of hummingbird flowers (These nectars vary from 1:5 to 1:4.). A stronger concentration of sugar can put a hummingbird at risk of dehydration. Unfortunately, many people believe that a higher concentration, especially in cold weather, will give the hummingbirds more energy and they think it works because the birds may come to the feeder more frequently. The more frequent visits are because the bird is dehydrated and seeking more water. They normally get all of their water from nectars and other food sources. As the concentration of sugars is increased, more water is pulled from the tissues and eventually the hummingbird must seek water and come to the feeders for liquid. But, it is like us drinking salt water - the more we drink the more thirsty we become. For hummingbirds, as sugar increases, so does the incidence of dehydration. Suggestions of sugar concentrations of 2:1 or even 1:1 are sometimes made, but please don't do this. Stay with 1:4 throughout the year. A ratio of 3:1 can be tolerated, more so by Rufous than Anna's, but is still higher than natural sources. Best to stay with 1:4.

Red is not necessary and may pose a risk by concentrating the dye in such a small body, and minerals, proteins, electrolytes, etc. should never be added. They will obtain more than enough from their normal diet of small insects, spiders and their eggs (and plenty of these are still available and fed upon in the winter).

I would also add that you should use only pure, white table sugar. This is a pure form of sucrose; exactly the sugar found in hummingbird flower nectar. Don't use most organic sugars. There is nothing wrong with organic except that most brands are not as highly processed. For us that's no problem, but that pale brown color you see is molasses and that is something that hummingbirds cannot digest. Far better to give them the pure sugar they would naturally obtain from flowers. If one of your concerns is GMO, it is my understanding that this is only an issue with beet sugar, not cane sugar.

Unfortunately, honey is also sometimes suggested as a "natural" food. NEVER do this. Honey as a product made by bees and hummingbirds never go to bee hives to feed on it. They will never encounter honey in nature. Honey in a feeder can, unfortunately, often be a death sentence to hummingbirds. It is a combination of many different sugars, most of which a hummingbird cannot digest. Also, honey often contains fungal spores, some of which can infect the hummingbird. You may have seen a hummingbird unable to retract its tongue and thus unable to feed. This is often the result of a fungal infection on the tongue and the source can be honey in a feeder.

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