



Autumnal Aerial Combat

Story by Susan Heller

The Ruby-throated is the only hummingbird that hangs in Connecticut for the summer. These tiny birds (the largest are only about 3.5 inches) are, in reality, very tough critters. They actually migrate as far south as Panama, though many make it to Mexico and decide to stay for the avian

equivalent of Margaritaville.

Several weeks ago I was in my garden and looked up to see two male Ruby-throated hummers vying for control of the fading monarda, cleome and false dragonhead. They are tanking up for the long flight south and will be around until first frost. Arrowing out of

the sky at astonishing speeds, they bellow their challenge (OK, “squeak” to us, but you should see it from inside their heads) and perform aeronautically impossible feats of flight, each intent on out-maneuvering the other. Itty bitty missiles of minuscule proportions, but gigantic ability and skill. In full dive display their wings beat up to 200 times a second and they can attain speeds as high as 63 miles per hour.

Kids of all ages are captivated by hummingbirds. From their flying abilities to their fanciful homes, Ruby-throats are the stuff of fairy tales. Smaller than most butterflies, these beauties can hover in mid-air, fly backwards, sideways and even upside down. Female Ruby-throats gather bits of leaves and flower bud petals, then weave them together with spider silk. (And they tried to tell me Thumbelina wasn't real.) The inside of the nest is soft with dandelion fluff or thistle down. Bits of lichen are used to camouflage the outside of the impossibly small nest which usually holds two beeny eggs the size of peas.

What is the best way to introduce your kids to these exquisite creatures? Ruby-throats acclimate very quickly to the presence of human beings, so a hummingbird feeder suspended close to a window or even one attached with a suction cup will offer prime-time viewing. Male Ruby-throats are highly territorial, so once one claims his turf (your feeder), he will hang around in the hood to guard it. Planting the right bushes and flowers in your garden will provide even more opportunities for hummers to take up residence because, in addition to their attraction to red hued flowers, they

also eat small insects.

Sometime this April the hummers will return to Connecticut. Want hummers in your garden spring 2013? Some flowers to plant to attract hummingbirds are: bee balm, begonia, bleeding heart, butterfly-weed, canna, cardinal flower, century plant, columbine, dahlia,



lily, delphinium, fire pink, foxglove, fuchsia, geranium, gladiolus, hollyhock, impatiens, lantana, lily, nasturtium, petunia, phlox, sage, snapdragon, spider flower, sweet william, verbena, zinnia.

Vines, trees, and shrubs that attract hummers include honeysuckle, morning glory, trumpet creeper, albelia, butterfly bush, flowering quince, rose of sharon, weigela, flowering currant, rosemary, buckeye and horsechestnut, black locust, flowering crabs, hawthorns, mimosa, and tulip poplar.

For assistance in selecting the correct plantings for your hummingbird garden, contact:

Austin Ganim Landscape Design at

203.333.2003 or austinganimlandscapedesign.com in

Hoffman Landscapes at 203.834.9656 or hoffmanlandscapes.com

Lanscaping by Odd Job at 203.655.3332 or oddjoblandscaping.com

Susan Heller has earned a reputation for excellence as a Writer, Ghostwriter, Producer and Director. She also designs and directs; TV spots, advertising, video and multimedia presentations when she's not writing speeches or helping other professionals hone their public speaking skills.