

## Feeding Birds and Bees after the Texas Freeze

By Lora Reynolds, Neighborhood News Staff Writer

As difficult as it was for us to cope with the epic Arctic freeze in mid-February, we were able to resume life as normal once our electricity and water woes eased and grocery stores restocked. Birds and bees, however, are not as lucky. Most blooming plants froze and bees rely on those plants for nectar, their food source. We need bees and other pollinators to survive and thrive, as they are responsible for pollinating over one-third of our food supply, including fruits, nuts, and vegetables.

A simple way you can provide a food source for bees until plants start blooming is to mix one cup of white table sugar with one cup of water and place it in a shallow pan or bowl. Add some small rocks or marbles so bees have a place to perch while they drink, as they can't swim. Bees can't smell sugar water, so you'll need to put something scented in the water, such as a drop of lemongrass or spearmint essential oil, crushed tree leaves, cuttings from fresh herbs, or small pieces of overripe fruit. Do not use any other type of sugar or honey in your mixture, as it could be toxic to the bees. Place the container of sugar syrup in a part of your yard where you won't bother the bees and they won't bother you.

Hummingbirds are beginning to arrive from their wintering grounds south of the border, and they, too, appreciate having nectar to drink. The recipe for hummingbird nectar is one part white table sugar to four parts water. You can use an empty spaghetti sauce jar, typically 24 to 26 ounces, and fill it with three cups of water and  $\frac{3}{4}$  cup of sugar. Mix well and microwave until boiling, about five minutes. Let it cool, fill your hummingbird feeder with about a cup of the solution, and refrigerate the rest. Do not add red food coloring to the water and sugar mixture. Clean your feeders often, especially in the heat of summer. Find hummingbird feeding FAQs at <https://www.audubon.org/news/hummingbird-feeding-faqs>.

Butterflies, too, depend on nectar to survive. Monarch butterflies use milkweed plants to lay their eggs, so planting milkweed is high on the priority list for those who want to help sustain their populations. You can supplement plant nectar by providing overripe fruit for butterflies. They are attracted to apples, oranges, peaches, strawberries, and bananas, among other fruit. Read more recipes on <https://www.treehugger.com/make-food-struggling-monarch-butterflies-recipes-your-leftovers-4858585> if you'd like to help butterflies.



