



**melinda myers**



# ENHANCING YOUR garden's beauty



## Attracting hummingbirds

Create an inviting habitat for hummingbirds in your landscape. Start by planting flowers you both can enjoy. Be sure to include some hummingbird favorites with red and purple tubular-shaped flowers. The Energy Park hummingbird garden features salvia, zinnia, spider cleome, lavender, cuphea and milkweed.

Add one or more feeders to help attract and support hummingbirds throughout the summer, and as they migrate north in the spring and south in the fall. Fill the feeders with a 1-part sugar to 4-part water solution. Use hummingbird feeders with some red on them, but do not add red food coloring to the nectar mix as it can be toxic to the birds.

Replace the mixture and clean the feeders every few days to keep them clean and safe for the hummingbirds. Provide space between the feeders or place them on different sides of your house if you find a hummingbird trying to dominate the feeders. And make sure there is cover within 10 to 15 feet of the feeders, so they have a nearby safe retreat from predators.

Put feeders up a few weeks before the hummingbirds are expected to arrive and leave them up for at least two weeks after you see the last hummingbird in fall. Some of those migrating south through your area may be delayed due to illness or injury and will benefit from this extra food, since many of our fall flowers will be past their peak.

Skip the pesticides and tolerate a bit of insect damage. The hummingbirds and most songbirds eat insects and many feed them to their young, helping to manage insect pests in the garden.

Add a birdbath and keep it clean and filled with fresh water. Hummingbirds like to play in water mists and spray, so including a mister or fountain in your birdbath will be appreciated.

Be patient as it can take time for hummingbirds to find your yard. The wait will be worth it after they arrive and continue to return to your yard each year.

## Garden challenges

Each growing season presents challenges. Some are new, and others are a battle every year. Diseases, insect pests and weeds can make growing and enjoying our gardens more difficult.

Managing weeds is important. These unwanted plants compete with our garden plants for water and nutrients. In addition, some become hosts for insects and diseases, increasing the risk they can attack our desirable plants.

Removing weeds when they are young is much easier and prevents them from setting seed, which can result in hundreds or even thousands of new weeds in next year's garden. Nevertheless, rain may have prevented you from getting into your garden in a timely manner. After weeds flower, if you can't remove them, cut off the flowering stem to help reduce or prevent seed formation.

Once the weeds are removed, spread a layer of organic mulch over the soil surface. This prevents many weed seeds from sprouting, and those that do sprout will be much easier to pull.

Diseases occur when the disease organism (fungus, bacteria or virus) is present, the weather conditions are ideal for the disease, and you have a susceptible plant. Removing one of these factors prevents the disease from occurring. We can't control the weather, but we can reduce the amount of disease organisms present with proper garden sanitation. In addition, we can avoid growing plants that are highly susceptible to common diseases by planting disease-resistant varieties whenever possible.

Insect populations are also impacted by weather. Some are more prevalent in hot, dry weather, while wet weather can promote diseases that kill certain insects. Many predatory and parasitic insects along with songbirds help manage problem insects, too. Working with nature can mean better results with little or no intervention.

## New plants at Energy Park

Gardens are ever-changing, and the We Energies Energy Park gardens are no different. We removed a few plants that had outgrown their space or were not performing as well. As sad as it is to remove plants, it presents an opportunity to showcase some of the newer varieties now available.

We focused on smaller shrubs like Cobalt-N-Gold™ hypericum, Tiny Quick Fire® hydrangea, and Summerific® All Eyes on Me hardy hibiscus that won't obstruct sight lines. We added summer-blooming upright Red Pillar™ Rose-of-Sharon and Fiber Optics® buttonbush along the fence, both with great pollinator appeal. In addition, you'll find two new repeat-blooming bigleaf hydrangeas. Pop Star® is compact at 18 inches tall and long blooming, and Eclipse® has dark purple leaves on 3- to 5-foot-tall plants.

You'll also find several new perennial plant additions to the garden. Blackhawks big bluestem has leaves that emerge dark green, but turn deep purple as the season progresses. Little Red Fox little bluestem is a much shorter grass that only grows 24 to 30 inches tall. Look for the All-America Selections Winner and 2023 Perennial Plant Association Perennial of the Year, American Gold Rush Rudbeckia. This compact Black-eyed Susan is resistant to Septoria leaf spot disease that affects Goldsturm rudbeckia. No, we did not make a mistake planting Pink Diamonds fern-leaved bleeding heart in a sunny spot. This *Dicentra* needs full to part sun to thrive, producing flowers throughout the summer.

The heat and sun-tolerant Soiree Kawaii® annual vincas are planted in a variety of spots throughout the garden. Annuals make excellent space holders until newly planted trees and shrubs reach their mature size.

The new shrub and perennial additions are highlighted on the garden map. ➔



Learn more about the Energy Park Gardens, gardening tips and resources at [melindamyers.com](https://melindamyers.com).

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