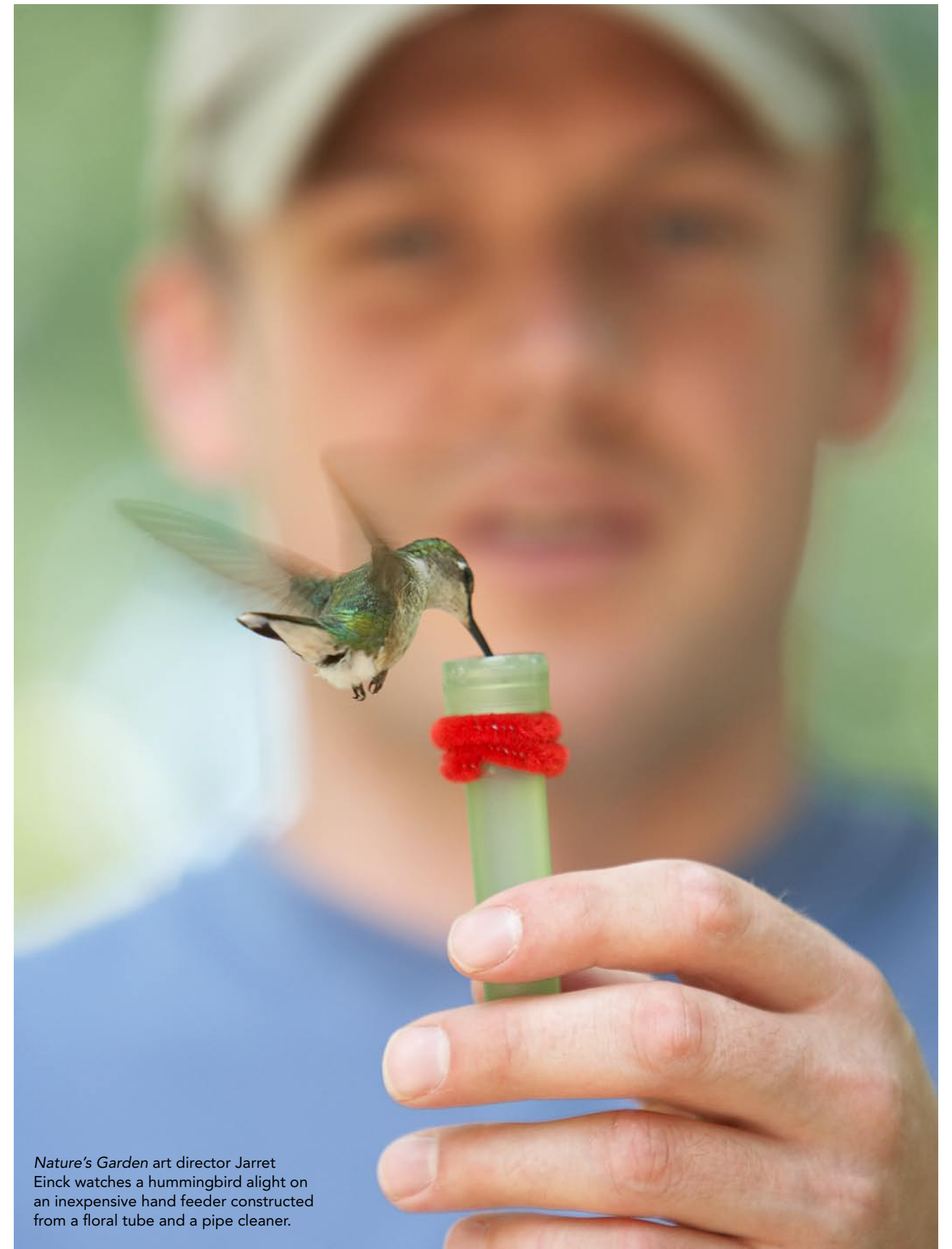


A close-up photograph of a hummingbird hovering near a hand-held feeder. The bird has a black head, a vibrant orange-red throat, and iridescent green wings. The feeder is a green plastic tube with a red fuzzy ring at the top. A person's hand is visible at the bottom, holding the tube. The background is a soft, out-of-focus green.

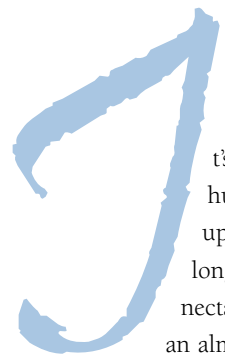
UP CLOSE & Personal

Hand-feeding hummingbirds is easier than you think. We share a few secrets for success.

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Nature's Garden art director Jarret Einck watches a hummingbird alight on an inexpensive hand feeder constructed from a floral tube and a pipe cleaner.



It's hard to resist the appeal of the hummingbird. With wings that beat up to 78 times per second and a long bill to help them procure flower nectar, they're unmistakable and have an almost magical charm. If you've ever longed for a closer look, why not try hand-feeding these tiny birds?

It's something you can do in your backyard, says Dave Sapienza, naturalist at Lake Hope State Park in McArthur, Ohio. He has created a program that lets park visitors hand-feed hummingbirds. His method has drawn as many as 35 Ruby-Throated Hummingbirds at one time.

Although your numbers at home might be smaller, you can use the same methods to attract the hummingbird species commonly found in your area (or migrating through). Sapienza fills a floral tube (available from florists) with sugar water (see recipe, right) and ties a red pipe cleaner around the top of the tube. Then, he says, it's just a matter of remaining completely still and waiting. "The most important thing is patience," Sapienza says.

To increase his chances for success, he hangs traditional hummingbird feeders in early April to get the tiny birds used to coming to the area. Then he starts the hand-feeding program in June, when more hummingbirds are in Ohio. "At home, try to hand-feed where you typically hang your feeder," Sapienza says. "We've found that dawn and dusk are the best times."



Make Your Own Nectar

To make hummingbird nectar, mix 4 parts water with 1 part sugar. Boil the mixture, let it cool, then use it to fill your feeders. You can store any extra nectar in your refrigerator for several days. Don't add red food coloring—it's not necessary and its effects on hummingbirds haven't been researched. Tap water is best because it contains minerals that are beneficial to hummingbirds. (Well water that's high in iron should not be used, though.) Be sure to clean and refill your feeder every day to prevent the growth of mold and bacteria. Simply scrub the feeder with a brush and rinse with warm water.

TOP and INSET: Dave Sapienza, park naturalist at Lake Hope State Park in McArthur, Ohio, gives park visitors tips about hand-feeding hummingbirds.



Be Patient!

- Here are a few tips for feeding hummingbirds by hand:
- Hang traditional feeders in the weeks before you try hand-feeding. The longer you have been regularly feeding hummingbirds in your yard, the better the chance you will have of feeding them by hand.
 - Suspend floral tube feeders from trees and shrubs in the days before hand-feeding to get the birds used to them.
 - Take traditional hummingbird feeders down when you're ready to begin hand-feeding.
 - Try not to get too excited. Beginners often shake with excitement, scaring away potential visitors.





Birds at Hand

For several weeks in September, many communities celebrate hummingbird migration:

- Holly Springs, Mississippi: Hummingbird Migration Celebration; www.msaudubon.org
- Lake Jackson, Texas: Xtreme Hummingbird Xtravaganza; www.gcbo.org
- Folsom, Louisiana: Folsom Hummingbird Festival; www.mizellfarms.com



"The most important thing is patience." —Dave Sapienza

For More Information

Hummingbird hand-feeding programs are offered several afternoons a week from the third week of June until Labor Day at Lake Hope State Park in McArthur, Ohio. Programs are free, but a \$1 donation is strongly encouraged. For more information, visit www.lakehopestatepark.com or www.1800hocking.com, or call the Lake Hope Nature Center at 740/596-3030.

