

Pet-Safe Hummingbird Garden Checklist

A print-and-walk checklist for running a hummingbird yard that also has dogs and cats. Work through it once at setup, then use the seasonal block as a recurring routine.

1. Pet-safe setup

- ☐ Walk the dog's actual patrol lane and nap spots; keep new nectar beds off both.
- ☐ Edge nectar drifts with curbing, boulders, or low steel so traffic stays on hardscape or turf.
- ☐ Set thorny and spiny accents (ocotillo, agave, barrel cactus) back from run lanes and gates — a physical hazard, not a toxicity one.
- ☐ Confirm every new plant against the ASPCA database before purchase.
- ☐ Fence off or omit higher-concern species: lantana, oleander (omit entirely in a pet yard), aloe, milkweed.
- ☐ Remove cocoa mulch anywhere in the yard; switch to shredded bark, wood chips, or straw.
- ☐ No rodenticides, no broad-spectrum insecticides, no sticky traps or tanglefoot in beds.
- ☐ Cat plan decided: indoors or enclosed catio is the only approach that reliably protects birds. Collars and bells are partial measures.
- ☐ Vet number and a pet poison hotline number posted where the family can find them.

2. Feeders and plants

- ☐ Lower-risk nectar plants shortlisted: autumn sage and other salvias, Mexican honeysuckle, chuparosa, penstemon, desert willow, red yucca.
- ☐ Mister or low-flow drip placed over a planted bed or gravel drain area — not over dog turf.
- ☐ Any ground-level basin kept untreated: no algaecide, no additives, because dogs will drink from it.
- ☐ Feeding kept to one open station with clear sight lines rather than several hidden ones.

Item	What to confirm
Feeder height	5–6 ft up, and away from any bench, low wall, or spa deck a dog can jump from.
Feeder location	Never over lawn or a dog run. Spilled nectar draws ants, bees, and wasps to nose height.
Ant control	Water-filled ant moat only. No oil, grease, or insecticide on the hanger — it transfers to feathers and fur.
Nectar recipe	1 part plain white sugar to 4 parts water. No dye, no honey, no brown sugar.
Shade	Filtered shade. Full-sun feeders spoil in hours here.
Bait stations	Tamper-resistant housings only, kept out of the feeder drip zone. Follow the label.

Hummingbirds eat small insects and spiders for protein. Insecticide drift removes their food and reaches pets.

3. Seasonal tips

Season	Routine
Summer (Jun–Sep)	Change and rinse nectar every 1–2 days. Rinse paving under the feeder weekly. Dump and refill misters and basins every 1–2 days so nothing breeds mosquitoes.

Fall (Oct–Nov)	Nectar every 2–3 days. Plant new salvias, penstemon, and desert willow — fall planting is the strongest window here.
Winter (Dec–Feb)	Nectar weekly. Keep chuparosa and aloe blooming to hold the gap for resident Anna's hummingbirds. Do not pull feeders.
Spring (Mar–May)	Nectar every 2–3 days, moving to every 1–2 days as highs pass 100°F. Scrub feeders before peak season, and check ant moats weekly.

Seasonal timing is written for the Phoenix low desert. Higher-elevation Arizona yards run several weeks later in spring and earlier in fall.

4. Warning signs to act on

- [] Black specks or cloudy nectar — take the feeder down and scrub it, do not top it off.
- [] Ant trail on the hanger — clean the drip zone and refill the moat rather than adding a chemical.
- [] Bees or wasps working the ground under the feeder — move the feeder off that surface entirely.
- [] Dog showing interest in a specific plant — fence the bed or remove the plant, and call your vet with the species name if it was chewed.

Before you plant. No plant list is a guarantee. Animals vary and quantity matters — confirm every species against the ASPCA toxic and non-toxic plant database before you buy, and call your veterinarian or a pet poison hotline if you think your animal ate something.

Full guide: aeoutdoorliving.com/gardening/guides/pet-safe-hummingbird-garden-arizona · Pet-safe plant lists: aeoutdoorliving.com/gardening/guides/kid-and-pet-safe-plants-and-trees-arizona

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