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Growing Hummingbird Mint in Utah Gardens

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Quick Facts

- Hummingbird mints are a group of ornamental herbaceous perennials that bloom from early summer to fall, in colors ranging from pink, red, orange, purple, blue, and yellow.
- They are popular with various pollinators including hummingbirds and butterflies.
- Most cultivars grow to 18-36 inches tall and wide depending on the cultivar.
- They tolerate full sun and grow in most soils if the soil is not waterlogged.
- They do not require frequent irrigation once established.

Introduction

Most hummingbird mint species (*Agastache spp.*) are native to the American Southwest and Mexico. They are members of the mint family, but do not aggressively spread like spearmint and peppermint. Most are cold-hardy along the Wasatch Front, Moab and St. George. Many also grow in colder areas of Utah, but care must be taken to be sure. Table 1 lists common species, USDA hardiness zones, mature size, and flower colors. Many cultivars and hybrids have been created that have given more variety to their flower colors and mature sizes than is shown in the table. Residents can find their hardiness zone at www.forestry.usu.edu/trees-cities-towns/tree-selection/hardiness-zone

Table 1. Selected common hummingbird mint species.

Species	USDA Hardiness Zone	Mature Size	Flower Color
Orange hummingbird mint (<i>Agastache aurantiaca</i>)	5 - 8	12-30 inches tall, 12-24 inches wide	Yellow, red, orange
Texas hummingbird mint (<i>A. cana</i>)	5 - 8	18-36 inches tall, 12-24 inches wide	Violet, blue, rose, red
Cusick's hyssop (<i>A. cusickii</i>)	4 - 8	6 - 12 inches tall and wide	Light purple
Anise Hyssop (<i>A. foeniculum</i>) (Figures 1 and 2)	4 - 8	4 feet tall and wide	Lavender, purple
Licorice mint, threadleaf giant hyssop (<i>A. rupestris</i>) (Figures 3 and 4)	5(6)- 9	18-24 inches tall, 12-18 inches wide	Pink-orange to orange



Figure 1. *Agastache foeniculum* (anise hyssop).



Figure 2. *A. foeniculum* (anise hyssop) flowers.

Hummingbird mint attracts various pollinators including native bees, honey bees, pollinating flies, hummingbirds and butterflies.

Planting and Irrigation

Hummingbird mints prefer full sun and do not tolerate wet, poorly-drained soil. However, during the first year of establishment, soil should not be allowed to completely dry out between irrigation

events. After plants have grown for about 1 year and are established in the landscape, irrigate deeply every 7 to 14 days.

Fertilization

Hummingbird mint rarely needs supplemental fertilizer, being tolerant of nutrient poor soil. Too much fertilizer can reduce flowering and cause plants to become unkempt.

Plant Spacing

Plant spacing depends on mature size (Table 1). In general, space plants 18 – 36 inches apart.

Diseases and Pests

Hummingbird mint is usually pest and disease free. Their most common problems are root and foliar diseases promoted by excessive irrigation. It is highly resistant to browsing by deer.



Figure 3. *A. rupestris* (licorice mint).



Figure 4. *A. rupestris* (licorice mint) flowers.

Other Maintenance

Threadleaf hyssop (*A. rupestris*) has been noted to become less hardy over time in Utah. Although some sources cite it as being hardy to Zone 5, or even Zone 4, it seems to perform best in Zones 6 and warmer. Although it may persist for some time in Zones 4 and 5, it is probably best to consider it a short-lived perennial or an annual in these areas.

Spent flowers can be deadheaded as needed throughout the summer. This will encourage reblooming and make the plants look tidy. Cut back foliage to just above ground level in the fall after plants go dormant, or foliage is killed by hard frost. Plants will regenerate from roots as the weather warms in the spring. Divide dormant plants in late fall or early spring every 3 to 5 years by splitting the crowns and roots with a shovel into segments around 6 inches wide. Replant segments as soon as possible. Segments can be stored for a few days in pots or boxes as long as the roots are not allowed to dry out. If storing, cover roots with moist soil, sawdust, compost, or other similar material.

Hummingbird mint is easy-to-grow and well-suited for landscapes in much of Utah. If planted in a sunny location with adequate drainage, it will be an asset to any garden, especially those where water conservation is a priority. Since it is naturally pest-free and resistant to animal feeding, it is also a great choice for the low-maintenance garden.

References

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