

# Tom's Garden

## Blog August 2020

### Repel Mosquitos Naturally

How would you like to brighten your flower beds, flavor your food, support wildlife, and repel mosquitos in your yard?

Aren't you curious?

Mosquitos are pesky insects that annoy people and carry diseases. Instead of using dangerous chemicals and insecticides which harm beneficial insects, try an approach that is an Earth-friendly alternative.

Flowers such as marigolds and geraniums repel mosquitos naturally while adding beauty to your landscape. The flowers also provide nectar for pollinating insects, and as an added plus, they are also deer resistant.

There are several herbs that repel mosquitos. Basil, rosemary, sage, and peppermint are a few varieties that will not only fend off mosquitos but will provide seasonings for some of your favorite meals. These are also deer resistant.

While some plants are effective in repelling mosquitos, they are only part of the solution. One other important thing to do is eliminate any standing water.

To boost your efforts, consider putting up a bat house. According to [batrescue.org](http://batrescue.org), a single bat can consume up to 1,000 mosquitos per hour and half its body weight each night.

Attracting bats to your yard will greatly reduce the mosquito population and provide habitat for an endangered species. I hope you will consider taking this Earth-friendly approach to pest control this summer and in coming years. By doing so, you'll create a better and safer environment for everyone.

To view instructions for building a bat house visit:

[www.diynetwork.com/how-to-build-a-bat-house](http://www.diynetwork.com/how-to-build-a-bat-house)

Bat houses are also available at most hardware and nursery stores.

### Salvia and Hummingbirds

#### Pair perfectly Together

With their long beaks and tongues, hummingbirds have the right equipment to get nectar from tubular flowers that bees just can't reach.

More than half of the salvia species originate in the tropical and sub-tropical regions of America, where they have been feeding hummingbirds for thousands of years. Hummingbirds literally push a lever that brushes the stamen against their head. The birds then go to the next flower with a crown of pollen on their head to trade pollen with that flower. This pollination method is called "Trapdoor."

Types of sugars in nectar are specific to bird or insect pollinated plants. Insect pollinators like simple sugars like fructose and glucose.

Hummingbirds have a thirst for sucrose, which is like white table sugar. That's why we mix a 1:4 solution of white table sugar to water for hummingbirds in our feeders. The physiology of hummingbirds allows them to break down sucrose into food. With wings that beat 50 times per second and a heart that beats over 1,000 beats per minute, hummingbirds burn a lot of fuel. Salvias with red, pink or orange flowers bring hummingbirds out of the sky. Insects such as bees like the colors of blue and purple.

Hummingbirds rely on colors rather than the scent of flowers. Insect pollinated flowers waft perfume into the air to attract bees and other insects.

Ruby-Throated hummingbirds are the only species we have in the East. They are migratory and winter anywhere from Florida to Panama. Their migratory paths coincide with the flowering periods of their favorite flowers which include salvias among others.

Thanks to gardeners importing nectar-rich species of flowers from all over the world, hummingbird flight patterns are slowly changing. Hummingbirds notice the visual presence of flowers that can have the rewards they want, and they are fast learners. Hummingbirds also remember where their last meal came from. That is why you'll often see one coming back to the spot where you took your feeder down for the winter.

The popularity of European and South American salvias has greatly extended hummingbird season in colder climates, especially since our winters are milder now. They have learned to use flowers that didn't exist here in past decades.

Gardening has become an increasingly important factor in allowing hummingbirds to stay here longer and expand their ranges. Hummingbirds are continuing to evolve and more birds are overwintering in the U.S. Most salvias would be considered annuals in Ohio's USDA zone 5-6.

### Kiss-me-over-the-garden-gate

A plant such as this is worth having in the garden for the name alone. Also known as the Prince's Feather.

Although kiss me over the garden gate is native to China, it has a long history in American gardens, going back to President Thomas Jefferson, who liked to include bold plants in his famous gardens. The plants gradually fell out of favor, a victim of breeding compact bedding plants in tidy nursery six packs.

This plant will adapt to any climate as an annual flower. When the weather warms up the plants grow very quickly, eventually reaching a height of five to seven feet, rewarding gardeners with blooms from early summer to first frost. Best of all for those who like tall flowers, this heirloom never needs staking.



Full sun will keep your prince's feather plants from getting too floppy in an attempt to stretch towards the light. Some afternoon shade is acceptable. Volunteer seedlings the next year should be thinned out.

A little neglect won't harm this easy-care annual. Average soil and no supplemental fertilizer will keep you in blooms all summer.

Kiss me over the garden gate adds a lot of visual interest to the back of the border and has a small footprint.

The flowers are good for adding height to arrangements and the blooms dry well.

What fun it is to have such a lovely name in the garden.

Persicaria orientalis

Kiss-me-over-the-garden-gate



Kiss me over the garden gate grows so rapidly that you won't find transplants of this annual for sale, and must be started from seed. You can start the seeds indoors a month or two before the average last frost, or plant in place in the spring.