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All About Agastache: Growing Hummingbird Favorites For The Waterwise Garden





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By David Salman, High Country Gardens Chief Horticulturist

Agastache, also called Hummingbird Mint and Hyssop, are fragrant and long-blooming perennials. These are must-have plants for waterwise landscapes that are filled with flowers and plenty of pollinators. We'll help you choose the right Agastache varieties for your garden, and give you tips for how to cultivate these outstanding showy flowers. The important thing to remember about successfully growing the Hummingbirds Mints is “tough love.”



Blue Fortune Hummingbird Mint (Hyssop)

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Adaptable Agastache Across The USA

The various species found in the Eastern US have smaller flowers and are pollinated primarily by bees and butterflies. The various species found in the Western US and northern Mexico have larger, showier flowers that are pollinated primarily by hummingbirds.

In general, the blue-flowered varieties are more tolerant of moisture and a bit more tolerant of enriched soils. 'Blue Fortune' is a European hybrid hyssop known for its vigor, cold hardiness, and adaptability to grow across much of the US. Like Korean Hyssop, such as Korean Zest Agastache, this cultivar will also perform well outside of the West in the wetter winter climates of the Midwest and East. The Midwestern species *Agastache foeniculatum* (Anise Hyssop) is also reliably cold hardy.





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Waterwise Orange, Pink, and Red Agastache

The native species and hybrids of Southwestern origin are famous for their large flower spikes in orange, pink, and red hues. These *Agastache* are unsurpassed at attracting hummingbirds. If you have them planted, the hummingbirds will find them!

Native to dry, hot, and sunny climates, these varieties are ideal for low-water landscapes. They need well-drained soil in the garden, and they are sensitive to cold, wet winter soils.

That makes these much more challenging to grow in USDA zone 5& 6 and regions with rain and snow amounts over 25" per year. Of course, we gardeners love to push the boundaries when trying new plants. To grow these incredible flowers in wet zones 5 and 6, I recommend planting them in a container garden or pot where they will thrive. Then you can treat them as an "annual" or bring them into a greenhouse, cold frame, or cold sunroom for the winter. They will be fine for 2 to 3 years in a pot.

In moister, warmer winter climates such as Washington D.C. (USDA zone 7), the Southwestern species and hybrids are very happy as long as the soil drainage is excellent. That means no clay soil!



New Mexico Hummingbird Mint (*Agastache neomexicana*)

How To Grow Agastache: The Secret To Cultivation

- The important thing to remember about successfully growing the Hummingbirds Mints is **“tough love.”**
- As a general rule, these plants like to grow in hot, dry conditions once established.
- As for their soil, the “leaner” (less fertile) and more well-drained, the better. Stay away from rich loams and heavy clay. See our guide, [How To Create Well-Drained Soil](#).
- Fertilize organically with a little quality compost and [Yum Yum Mix](#) in the fall. Chemical fertilizers will push these plants too much and weaken their tolerance to cold.

- Leave the stems standing over the winter months to increase cold hardiness. Cut back hard in mid-spring.

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For more information and to watch a planting video, visit our guide: [How To Plant & Grow Agastache](#)



The Best Garden Tested Varieties

Growing Agastache plants has been an obsession of mine for over 25 years and counting.

Learn more about my work developing Agastache cultivars for waterwise gardens: [Agastache Introductions: Superstars Of The Perennial World.](#)

Many of the newer *Agastache* hybrids have had limited testing in outdoor growing conditions. Based on my extensive garden experience with these perennials in the Intermountain West, here are some of my top picks.

Muhly Pink Flamingo Grass with Agastache Ava

- *Agastache* 'Desert Sostice' – A 2012 High Country Gardens exclusive introduction that I bred, this tough hybrid is a cross between the two best Southwestern species *Agastache cana* and *A. rupestris*. A semi-dwarf grower, it has stunning flower spikes with pink and orange flowers and a strong, pleasing herbal scent.
- *Agastache* 'Ava' - My best hybrid introduced through High Country Gardens in 2004. If this cultivar is a good fit for your growing conditions, it will be one of your showiest perennials. Blooming for many months beginning in mid-summer, the bright rose-red flowers and non-fading calyxes are stunning.

Agastache cana 'Rosita' – A High Country exclusive. A semi-dwarf form of the species, *A. cana* that I found some years ago, grown from habitat collected seed from southern New Mexico. It has about 50% more bright rose-pink flowers (corollas) in the

spike than is typical, so the flower spikes are particularly plump and full. 'Rosita' has a most delicious sweet herbal fragrance too. [Sign Up For Our Email](#)

How do you pronounce the Latin genus known as Agastache?

In Colorado and New Mexico, where we can grow a wide variety of these wonderful perennials, we generally say the name as A-ga-stä-key, A-gas-tā-key, or A-gas-tä-key. I've also heard it spoken as A-ga-stash-ē or A-gas-tach-ē. However, if you're still not comfortable uttering the name in public, call these superb plants by one of their common names; hummingbird mint or hyssop.

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Texas Hummingbird Mint (Hyssop).

Agastache cana

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New Mexico Hummingbird Mint (Hyssop).

Agastache neomexicana

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