



Lesson On When To Change The Feeder Sugar Solution

After you have been dealing with hummingbirds, their feeders, and the associated sugar solution for a while, you will invariably run into the question of when you should change the solution (and what to do with the remaining solution, if there is any).

The sugar solution will not last forever. My experience here in Southern California – where we have hummingbirds visiting us year-round – is that the solution will not last outside, in warm weather, any longer than two weeks. Whereas sugar itself (when dry and in crystal form) will last indefinitely, the sugar solution is basically a great medium in which one can grow bacteria and other micro-flora. The end result is your hummingbirds won't much care for degraded/contaminated sugar solution, which will mean that they drop off in their visits to your feeder (which is the whole purpose behind putting feeders out). Also, there is the risk that you might sicken the hummingbirds with a contaminated solution, which is also not one of our objectives.



The photo above is meant to give you an idea of what the feeder sugar solution looks like after two weeks (this was taken in mid-May). As you can see, the solution becomes cloudy-white. Your takeaway here is this: If the sugar solution is no longer clear, it is time to change out the solution with fresh sugar

solution. You also need to wash the feeder thoroughly prior to refilling it with fresh solution.



After you have cleaned the feeder and refilled it with fresh sugar solution it should look like the photo above. I happen to keep a third feeder always available for the busy season (all summer), as well as for any extra sugar solution that I may have so that I don't have a lot of waste. Something that I have experimented with is filtering the hazy solution from my main feeders for use in this third feeder. The equipment that I use is shown below.



The idea here is to use a regular drip coffee filter to filter out any particulate matter from the remaining solution that is beginning to get cloudy. I have found that this simple solution works very well, with the

cost being measured in the time to do it along with the cost of one coffee filter. It takes under 10 minutes to do this.

Anyway, it simply requires passing the cloudy sugar solution through the coffee filter – here I use a funnel to support the filter – and into a clean feeder (you really do have to clean the receiving filter for this to work) as pictured below.



When you finish with the filtering process you should have a feeder, like the one pictured below, full of clear sugar solution. I would recommend only doing this once with the cloudy sugar solution (i.e., don't try to filter, then re-filter over and over again).



On another note relating to contaminated/old sugar solution, I have found that small, and not so small, spiders keep infiltrating my feeders. I have found spiders that were so bold as to actually pass through the sugar solution and end up floating on the

top of the sugar solution reservoir (dead, of course). I have found other small spiders hiding inside of the bottom plastic portion of the feeders in ones that have been completely emptied out. My advice relating to spider discoveries is to not reuse the sugar solution in feeders that have been contaminated with dead insects. I should think that there are more complications/variables relating to dead insects floating in our sugar solution that I don't think would easily get filtered out.

Good luck on keeping your hummingbirds happy and well-fed!

Note: Depending on where you position your feeder, you may find that the filtered sugar solution doesn't last all that long. During the time that the sugar solution is kept outside, especially during the summer months, it may become more concentrated due to higher temperature induced evaporation. I have experienced this with feeders that are placed in sunny locations, without the benefit of shade, like the one pictured below.



What can happen with the filtered solution in a location like this is further evaporation will concentrate the sugar water to the point where it becomes very thick, with an almost molasses-like texture. The hummingbirds don't seem to appreciate this confection, so it is best to try to avoid having this happen. The best solution that I have come up with is to locate the feeder with the filtered solution in a more shaded location (like the one pictured below) to

forestall the concentrating effect of the sun. Try this out if you find your sugar solution going thick and gooey.



When in doubt, chose a shaded location for your feeder if at all possible.