

# ~~EASY, SIMPLE,~~ GARDEN PHOTOGRAPHY

## PHOTO TIPS AND TECHNIQUES FOR BETTER DIGITAL PHOTOS

Plus: Photography tools from the home

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The title suggests that even with the best equipment and techniques, garden photography is not easy or simple. Taking superior photographs should always be viewed as a challenge.

This quote, attributed to Sam Haskins (1926 – 2009), a famous Australian fashion and art photographer, is worth considering:

**A photographer went to a socialite party in New York. As he entered the front door, the hostess said “I love your pictures – they’re wonderful; you must have a fantastic camera.” He said nothing, until dinner was finished, then said: “That was a wonderful dinner; you must have a terrific stove.”**

This says, cut through all the infatuation with “equipment” and concentrate on “thoughts” as you approach your garden photography. This short lesson will help you take better digital photos in your garden without the need for a fancy camera and expensive equipment. While you may prefer a digital reflex camera, all of these tips and techniques work equally well with **any** camera. If you have a point-and-shoot, use it with confidence.

During my college journalism photography class, the mnemonic “**FAST**” (decoded as **F**ocus, **A**perture, **S**hutter, and **T**HINK) was drummed into our heads. It made sense, particularly when the equipment was a 4 x 5 inch sheet film, press camera. With all the controls and variables on that camera, FAST was essential. Talk about starting with the basics... That heavy beast of a camera took great pictures.

Today’s modern point-and-shoot digital camera, at a tenth of the size and a fraction of the cost will also deliver a superior photo, and it almost eliminates concerns with the first three principals of FAST, leaving only the most difficult aspect, “Think.” Photography, as in gardening, is a science-based. In photography, the laws of optics and light reign, in gardening nature rains...

## **Tips**

These garden photography tips have been gathered from personal experience and a variety of other sources. An Internet search can also generate many other garden photography tips.

## **Pixels are Cheap**

Digital cameras allow you to instantly check the results, so don't miss the opportunity to take lots of shots. You only need to use the best photos, so shoot with abandon!

## **Manipulating the Camera**

Using a tripod can help steady your camera in low light conditions. Your own shaky hand or the wind often results in a blurred photo. The tripod can be cheap, or you can cobble one up from a hardware store wood clamp, a ¼ inch machine screw (that fits the camera tripod socket), and a wooden stake (don't forget the hammer). No tripod? Steady the camera hand on a nearby immovable object.

You can even use the annoying shutter time delay to your advantage when using a tripod. Frame the shot carefully, press the shutter button and instantly remove your finger, letting the camera do the rest of the work. You can also use the camera time-release to get the same shake-free results when using the tripod. Just press and release...

Consider turning off the camera's flash if your camera has a manual mode. Flash tends to wash-out highlights on lighter colored subjects.

## **Manipulating the Light**

Ideally, outdoor photographs taken during the "Golden Hour" have the most dramatic effect. The Golden Hour occurs twice a day, from dawn to 8:00 am, and later in the day in the hours just before sunset. During these times the sun's light travels through more of the Earth's atmosphere, softening the light and giving it a reddish hue that many find pleasing.

Cloudy days (and even those with rain) provide the optimum color and contrast for flower photography.

If your photo opportunity doesn't fit the Golden Hour schedule, you can make a light diffuser from metal coat hanger and plastic bag to tone down the harsh highlights and strong shadows created by the midday sun. Hold the camera with one hand, using the diffuser in the other to soften the sunlight falling on the flower. Depending on the thickness of the plastic, you may have to cut out a single layer and tape it over the coat hanger. I've found a metal hoop from a discarded craft project that works fine.

Household aluminum foil can help backlight the subject, adding depth to the photo. A light colored towel or a piece of plastic can also help you with backlighting. You may want to isolate the flower from the background for a dramatic effect. In those cases a dark colored cloth can make a lighter colored photo pop-out from the background.

### **Manipulating the Subject**

Don't just take a snapshot of a flower that interests you and then move on. Set up your first shot to include the whole flower then zoom in, concentrating on the details that catch your eye. Focus later shots on the color or small details of the flower.

Many times the natural patterns of the foliage will add additional impact to your photo. Carefully frame your photo to include these visual highlights.

Try different angles with your shots. If conditions permit, get down and capture the details of the plant or flower from the side at ground level. Get as close as you can! Don't forget that pixels are cheap!

Breezy days can be combated by using an old cardboard box to shield your subject from the wind. It doesn't have to be fancy.

Add interest to your flower photos by gently spraying the blossom with water from a cheap spray bottle. The resulting beads of moisture look great!