

PHS Tips to Better Garden & Documentation Photography

- **People are smart...cameras are stupid**

--*The first rule of photography: Cameras are dumb*

Cameras cannot think or feel emotion. It just records what it sees. Because of these limitations, photographers have to be smart and learn to compensate for the camera's limits.

- **Digital Camera by Type**

--*Types of cameras*

SLR: A "single lens reflex" camera is a camera that allows the shooter to look at the subject *through* the lens. This is the kind of camera that most professional photographers use. SLRs also give shooters the ability to switch lens (for example, from a wide angle to a telephoto).

Point 'n' shoot: A small camera with the body, lens, and often flash built into one unit. These cameras usually sell for under \$200 and are very convenient, but can have limitations in quality and versatility.

Hybrid (All-in-One): Basically, this is a large point 'n' shoot camera with some pro-SLR features, but without the ability to change lenses. They generally come with a fixed zoom lens.

--*Types of lens & filters*

Wide-angle: A lens that can show a wide view of a subject, such a landscape. Also interesting for close-up work.

Telephoto: A lens that can bring a far-off subject up close, such a person standing 20-feet away.

Zoom: A versatile family of lenses that cover many focal ranges, typically from wide-angle to zoom. They are very handy, but sometimes require shooting in brighter light, using a flash, or placing the camera on a tripod.

Macro: A specialty lens for shooting subjects close up, like flowers or insects.

•Lighting

--*Lighting is everything!*

Look Before You Shoot: Before taking pictures, get a sense of the available light. Too sunny? Too cloudy? These factors will figure into the techniques you apply to your outdoor photography.

--*Sun vs. clouds*

No Fun in the Sun: In contrast to popular opinion, shooting at midday on a sunny day is perhaps the worst kind of lighting situation. Sun creates unpleasant contrasts and hard, dark shadows. One trick is to shoot a subject with its back to the sun and then light the subject with “fill flash” (see below).

Cloudy Days: *Surprise!* The best kind of shooting days are often those with bright, even cloud cover. Clouds create flat, even contrast, light shadows, and can make colors really pop, especially on flowers. On the other hand, dark cloudy days may not give you enough light for non-flash photography. Use a flash in these situations.

Dusk and Dawn: You don’t often see professional photographers in the middle of the day because the sun is coming straight down and makes for flat, contrast-y images. Instead, they tend to work at dawn or dusk. Why? Because dawn and dusk can provide dramatic, pleasing lighting effects, largely because the sun is hitting the landscape at such a low angle. There are also colors that appear in the sky and landscape that only appear at this time of day. If you want to make a strong artistic statement with a photo, set your alarm clock.

--*Flash vs. Natural light (plus “fill flash”)*

The Great Debate: Many photographers will disagree widely on the use of flash—some swear by it, other dislike it. In general, flash is good to use on dark days or sometimes on sunny days to “fill” in shadows (this is often done automatically on modern cameras). Other photographers like to use available “natural” light and manipulate with a number of tricks (see “Reflectors” under *Techniques* below).

Indoor Flash: Unless you use a very fast film, a tripod, and perhaps even a color-correcting filter (to get rid of the yellow of incandescent lightbulbs), you’ll probably want to use a flash indoors: use a flash unless you have a fast film or tripod. Normal flashes tend to create harsh light and “red eye.” To reduce these ill effects, you can buy “bounce” flashes that allow you to bounce the light off a wall, ceiling, or a reflector; or use the “red-eye reduction” feature on your automatic camera.

Outdoor Flash: Flash can be useful on sunny days when you’re shooting a backlit object. Without a flash, the subject would be dark, but fill flash gives just enough illumination to light the scene (this is the effect often used for outdoor fashion photography—you can tell because the model’s hair is brilliantly fringed by sunlight).

•Composition: Learning to Look & Finding the Subject

--*The second rule of photography: This is not reality*

Posing: Your job is to convey a message, so it's okay to bend reality to achieve your goals. If you're not getting a good shot of volunteers working together, for example, it is okay to pose people, as long as they look natural. Remember, it's all about the message

The Subject: Pick out a clear focal point or subject. REMEMBER: photos rarely capture more than one subject successfully. Keep the composition simple and uncluttered. If there are a lot of people milling around in the picture, try to concentrate on just one person or object.

Look at the Background: In addition to the subject, look at the background. Is the background clean and simple, or jumbled and busy? Busy backdrops (fences, streets, etc.) can make for unpleasant, overly complicated shots. Simple is best, be it a distant wall, or block of color. Think about color, too. If your subject is wearing a bright red shirt, don't put them in front of a red, pink, or purple wall. That will create a jarring clash of colors.

--*Get active!*

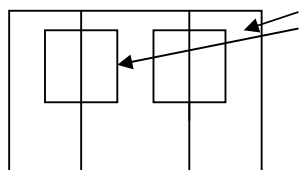
Framing a picture: One of the biggest mistakes amateur photographers make is simply looking at an object through the lens and snapping the picture. REMEMBER: cameras are stupid and can't see what you see. You must physically move in and frame your subject in the camera's viewfinder. Fill the viewfinder with your subject—don't stand too far away.

Framing people: Another big mistake is shooting people from too far away. This is especially true with point and shoot cameras with wide-angle lens (a common lens). This makes the subject look farther away than it really is. MOVE IN and fill the frame with the person(s) you want to shoot. You don't have to get their legs, knees, and feet in. Try shooting from the waist up for really close, personal shots.

Don't always stand: Sometimes you have to do whatever it takes to get a shot: bend over, kneel, lie down, climb up on a chair or rock. REMEMBER: the shot doesn't come to you; you have to go to the shot.

The Rule of Thirds: Don't always center the subject. Photos often look more interesting and dynamic when the whole image is broken into thirds, with the subject sitting on one of the dividing lines.

Example:



If you mentally break the image into thirds, you can place the subject off-center to create a more visually interesting shot. Here, the squares represent the subject.