

Shooting flowers like a pro

By Debra Lemire

The 2015 flower growing season is rapidly approaching and it will soon be time to grab your sunscreen, hat and camera and head outside to capture the beauty of nature. Unfortunately, most times the results of taking a picture do not match what the viewer sees. Presented below are tips for the amateur photographer to elevate his photo beyond snapshot level into a truly beautiful photograph that really conveys the magic of a flower.

1. Set your file format size to as large as you can for prints and cropping options;
2. Adjust your digital camera to the lowest ISO setting available, usually ISO 100 or 200 to achieve maximum image quality with minimum noise;
3. Change **White Balance** to **Daylight**;
4. Use a tripod to reduce camera shake. The ideal type is a heavy, sturdy tripod with legs that can splay out so you can photograph close to the ground. You can fine-tune a composition using a tripod and keep the point of focus exactly where you want it;
5. Use a remote cable release on your shutter to reduce camera shake. As an alternative, the camera's built in 2-second self timer can be used for sharp photos;
6. There are three ideal times to shoot flowers:
 - a. On cloudy, overcast days, the shadows are soft as the sun is hidden behind the clouds and the rich colours of the flowers aren't washed out by the harsh direct rays of the sun;
 - b. Just after a rain when the sky is still overcast and the raindrops are still on the petals;
 - c. On a sunny day, shoot in the early morning or late afternoon. To make the most of this light, shoot with a long zoom lens and position yourself so the flowers are backlit;
7. Use a telephoto lens to isolate a flower from its surroundings. A long lens set to its widest aperture or smallest f-stop number can put both the background and foreground out of focus so the viewer's attention is held where you want it;
8. Use selective focus. Choose where you want the viewers to look. Direct the eye to a certain point. If you are shooting one flower, isolate the subject, shoot on macro mode and move the camera around until you get the right focus. Take five or more single images until you get the right focus;
9. Use contrast between the subject and its background. If the subject is rich, vibrant and colourful, move your camera around until the background is plain – blue sky, green lawn or wooden fence;
10. Get in close to the subject and fill the frame with one flower. The closer you get the more critical focus becomes. Try focusing on the stamen and pistil and the centre of the flower remains crisp while the petals appear blurry;

11. Turn off autofocus. Depth of field is so narrow in close-up photography that precise focusing is critical, even with small apertures. To ensure your shots are sharp where you want, try switching to manual focus and doing it yourself;
12. Use the live view LCD screen rather than eye piece to adjust focus;
13. Shoot in manual mode. Forget automatic programs; manual mode enables you to choose the aperture and shutter combination that will give you the result you want. Checking your histograms will show you if you need to change a setting in order to produce a correctly exposed image. Bright flowers can fool your camera into underexposing, so shooting in manual and checking histograms can overcome this;
14. Shoot from a variety of angles and take a lot of pictures. Get to know your subject – first from a distance and slowly work your way in for intimate shots. The more you stay with the subject, the better you get to know it;
15. Shoot flowers from a different angle. Instead of shooting down of flowers, shoot from the side or underneath. Unique angles make flower shots more interesting;
16. Place your “key” flower in a position that uses the **rule of thirds** for the most impact;
17. Remember the wind. Even the gentlest of winds can affect flowers and move them. Use a faster shutter speed if needed;
18. Use a little spray bottle filled with water to spray the flowers yourself to fake a just rained look on your blooms;
19. Shoot flowers on a black background. Use a piece of black velvet or black velour, or a black suit jacket. Leave a few feet between your flowers and the black background (so the light falls off and the black looks really black) and then shoot away;
20. Use a white background. Buy a seamless roll of paper from you local camera store or two or three sheets of white mounting board. Use one behind the flowers and one off to the side to reflect natural light back onto the white background so it doesn’t look gray;
21. Use non-direct sunlight when shooting indoors. Shoot near a window for side lighting;
22. This winter use flowers from your local grocery store and PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE.