

Photographing Flowers - By Art Bova

Flowers are some of the most interesting subjects in nature because of their form, array of colors, and foliage. A photographer needs a beautiful subject in order to make an interesting and intriguing photograph. Flowers provide it!

Everyone should try to capture the beauty of their gardening efforts since the photograph can be displayed year-round when the flowers are not blooming. With enlargements available at common outlets, a photograph can easily be enlarged, matted, and framed for a low cost and serve as a beautiful reminder.

How do you do it?

Let's look at what the judges of photography look at when evaluating a good photograph. They look for impact, composition and technique. Impact is the overall impression that a photograph brings to your eye when you look at it. Composition is the arrangement within the photograph of the flower and how it is personified according to the rules of interest. The technique is the technical aspect of photographing - having a sharply focused subject, proper exposure of the lighting condition and whether you want everything in the background focused to bring out the main subject or out of focus to offer a contrast and to highlight the main subject.

There are three basic kinds of photographs that you can make of garden flowers. The first photograph is of the garden itself. The second is a photograph showing the flower in addition to the foliage. The third and most beautiful one, is a close-up of the flower itself. Let's look at all three.

The garden picture is a tough one. You want to have three areas of focus in your photograph. You want the foreground which is the bottom of the picture, the middle area which is the medium distance items in the picture, and the background which is the most remote area in the photo and probably the top of the picture.



Let's start in reverse order with the background. You have to make a decision whether you want the background in focus by focusing with equal distance in automatic cameras to all areas of the photo or selecting f16 in manual or automatic cameras or a narrow depth of field of f5.6 when you want the background blurred. When taking a full garden picture, most people want the background in focus, and you should make sure that everything is in focus and is equidistant. Surprisingly, most full garden shots should not have the sky in the picture, since the sky is normally quite bright compared to the dark, rich foliage in the picture. Film can not take a wide range between a very bright sky and a very dark foliage. Please move when taking a picture to make sure that you do not get in items that you do not want to focus on or that are distractions such as dead trees, garbage and garbage cans, and items that you do not want to highlight in your picture.

The middle area is probably the most difficult area because some times you will have a middle area that is interesting and you want to include, and other times it will be only the transition area between the foreground and the background. Nevertheless, you must position yourself so that your picture shows it in plain view with a lot of detail or has it out of focus when you use it only as a transition. This will require you to move around and position yourself to make your decision.

The most interesting part of your picture has to be the foreground. It is essential that your foreground be in focus, be interesting, be at an angle or show an "S" curve, and have all of the foliage vibrant and not brown or decaying. This is the area that the viewer will first look at in your photo and decide whether to look towards the rest of the picture. It must capture them. Therefore, make sure that your photo entices them with the color, the form and beauty of your flower and its foliage and surroundings.



The second kind of photo is the one of the flower and its foliage. This is probably one of the hardest ones to take because your foliage must be perfect and you need to

create an interesting composition. When you look at all the great paintings, there is form, substance and contrast. This needs to be in the photo even though you are somewhat limited in this kind of photo. You need to come in at an angle so that the flower creates interest along with the backdrop of the foliage. The foliage needs to be green with no brown spots and offer a beautiful contrast or a pleasant transition from the flower. You literally have to dance around until you find the best composition in order to take this shot.

The last and most important kind of photo is the flower up-close. This requires a close-up focusing lens on an interchangeable film camera or the ability of your digital camera to focus in closely. Here you have a lot of creative opportunities. You can come in at an angle to make sure the stigma, the anther and filament are in focus. It is very important that you have the pistil and stamen in focus. The petal and sepal can be in focus or out of focus, depending on what you are trying to show in your photo. If you want an ethereal photo, you probably want the petal and the sepal out of focus. However, at other times, you will want to have the petal and sepal in focus and have the items in the background out of focus.

You want to emphasize the color of the flower and the transitions of color in the flower. You want to be sure that you bring out the texture of the flower and you can do this by having light in the background seeping through the petal or you can have side-lighting. Orchids and the inner parts of an Iris are particularly photogenic for this kind of photography. You should vary the light that you apply. By changing your light and varying the intensity of your light, you will see a lot of interesting effects. In

photography terms, this is called bracketing, where you change your exposure by half-stops.



As I mentioned above, flower photography is best photographed with close-up lenses. These are available as a separate lens for interchangeable lens 35 mm cameras or on high-end point-and-shoot film cameras and on most digital cameras with variable focusing. The best kind of film to use is not Kodak film, but Fuji film. Also, the most radiant colors are captured on slide film. However, the most forgiving film is print film.

With digital development labs, your photographs can be easily changed and/or manipulated to bring out the best aspects and to cover-up errors and omissions. Work with your lab no matter where they are located and you will be surprised how they can turn an ugly picture into a radiant picture with some minor adjustments.

I hope that I have illustrated some of the techniques that you might want to apply in taking flower photographs.