

# Flower Photography Using a Mobile Phone Camera

By Peggy Cathey



I don't know about you, but I am looking forward to an excellent Daylily bloom season. With fresh, new blooms come our desire to capture them in a photo. In our Spring 2020 issue of *Daylilies of the Southwest*, I wrote an article on **Tips For Taking Better Flower Photographs**. In writing this article, I focused on using a digital camera because I had not successfully used a mobile phone to get sharp photos of my daylilies. Since I often forgot to take my camera with me and almost always had my phone, I decided it was time I learned how to use it. First, I upgraded to an Android, Motorola g(7) Supra, with a much better camera than what I had before. I decided to use it exclusively for my flower photography instead of my camera during the 2020 bloom season. It doesn't matter if you have an Android or iPhone; some of these tips should improve your skills.

Following are some tips I learned that might help you when using your phone's camera:

## SETTINGS



First, become familiar with your phone. Open the camera feature and look for the "gear," which will be "settings". There should be a choice there for the photo size. Choices there should be ratio and resolution. Choose the ratio you prefer (I like the 4:3 best) and for resolution, choose the most "MP" (megapixels) you can. A megapixel (MP) is equal to one million pixels (more or less, it's actually 1,048,576 pixels). Most phone cameras today offer 12MP. Megapixels doesn't necessarily mean a better photo; that depends on how good your camera's sensor is, but it does give you plenty of pixels if you plan to crop your images. You should also find an assistive grid (it looks like a box of squares) and a leveler. I suggest you turn both of these on. The grid will help you with your subject's positioning, and the leveler will let you know if you are tilting the camera. Neither the grid nor level will appear on your photos.

If your phone's camera has manual settings, play with them to see what all they do. They are very similar to any digital camera's manual settings. They may help if you want to stop action or slow the

movement down (as in the cotton candy effect you often see with waterfalls).

## NO FLASH

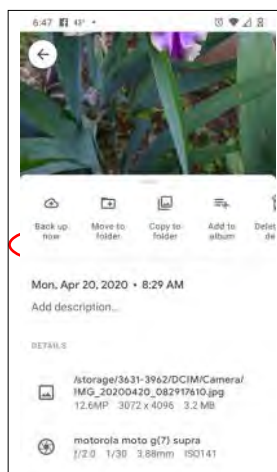


I would also suggest you set your flash to OFF. Flash is generally not your friend. Colors will be washed out with flash photography, and harsh shadows will usually show up behind your subject. Most mobile phone camera's automatic settings work very well for adjusting the light for even night photos. If you need more light, that is where your manual settings will come into play.

My phone camera also comes with built-in editing tools. Some of these could be quite useful, such as the crop tool. If your camera doesn't have editing tools, you can find LOTS of free apps in the App Store for iPhones or the Play Store for Android users that will do just about anything you want to do. If you are like me and have trouble seeing the small images, you can also download your photos to your computer for editing.

Next, hold your phone (camera) with two hands for better control. You can use your thumb or forefingers for releasing the shutter.

For keeping track of the names of your daylilies, you can take a photo of the flower and the tag, thereby doubling the number of images you have, or you can rename the file with the flower name, or (on my phone) scroll below the picture where you see



"Add description"  
(located under image in  
the photo gallery)



Use a "Text to Photo" app to type  
name directly onto photo

See Photography Tips on page 22



H. 'Sherry Candy'  
Stamile, 2006 (cropped)

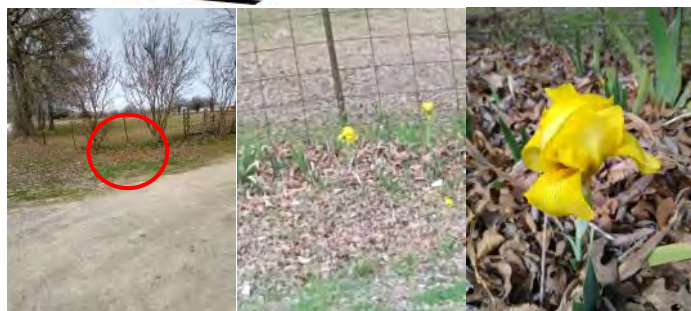
"description" and type the flower's name there. You can download "text to photo" apps, which will let you type the name right on your photo. If you position it at the top or bottom of the image, you can easily crop it out to print your photo.



## DON'T USE DIGITAL ZOOM

Another significant thing to remember is NOT to use digital zoom when taking a photo. For one thing, it is challenging to hold the camera still enough when zoomed out, and another, the image will undoubtedly be very blurry or pixelated. If possible, use your feet to zoom. I have an example of this with an iris blooming at our neighbors across the road from us. This poor little iris started to bloom in early February, about three days before a winter blast came, and we were below freezing for a week. Examples show the iris from across the road, zoomed in with the digital zoom, and using my feet to walk across the road to get the close-up.

## ZOOM! with your feet



Flower is barely visible from this distance

Digital zoom results in a blurry photo

By moving closer, you will be able to get a sharp image

## FOCUS

My advice for taking flower "portraits" with a digital camera was to use the "portrait" setting on the camera. My mobile phone camera has a portrait setting, but when I tried it to take a daylily *portrait*, I got a message that "no faces were detected." So, I fill the frame and get as close as I can, and take the photo. Then (this is where the digital zoom comes in handy), I zoom way in on the image looking at the stamens or something with a lot of detail. If that is in sharp focus, then I am pretty sure I have a good



H. 'Mount Herman Sonata'  
Carpenter-J, 2009



Screen shot- zoomed in on stamens

photo. If not, I take another shot until I get a good one. If you plan to send photos for print in the newsletter, you need sharp images. Spend some time practicing with your camera phone to figure out exactly where the camera will focus. Keep trying till you get it right and delete all the blurry images. A good portrait of your daylily should have the flower in sharp focus and the background slightly blurred, making the daylily stand out. Many faults can be overlooked or forgiven in a photo, but never bad focus – if the subject of your image is even slightly out of focus, your effort is ruined. Remember - **Focus...Focus...Focus!**



## TIMING

Timing can be essential. A slightly overcast sky is ideal, but we don't always have that situation, especially if we are on a bus tour at a convention or a Regional Meeting. If you attempt to take photos too

early, the blooms may not be fully opened. There could also be long shadows if the sun is beginning to rise. Full sun is also a big problem as your image's color details could be lost to too much light or too deep a shadow. A partner to hold an umbrella or something to block the sun and shade the bloom could be a big help in

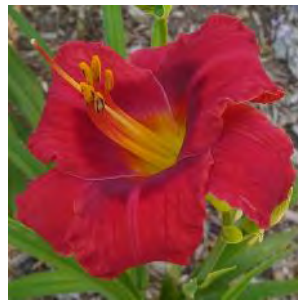


Sun and shadows  
H. 'Entwined In The Vine'  
Emmerich, 2007





"Body" shade



*H. 'Just For Joanne'*  
Herrington-T, 2005  
(cropped)

a really sunny situation. I have often used my body to shade the flower.

This trick only works if there is enough space around the flower in the shot to crop out your shadow. A bright, sunny background behind your bloom can also be very distracting.

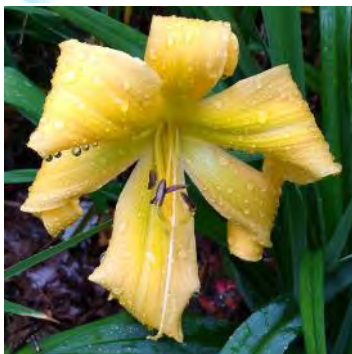
Remember to get in close and fill the frame. Most people don't want to see clutter or other distracting backgrounds when looking at daylily photos. If there is a tag or some object you can't move, change positions. Move around, get different angles.



## TRICKS



Do you like water drops on flowers? Go out after a gentle rain. No rain? Carry a spray



PDC Seedling #BAT 10-B-2

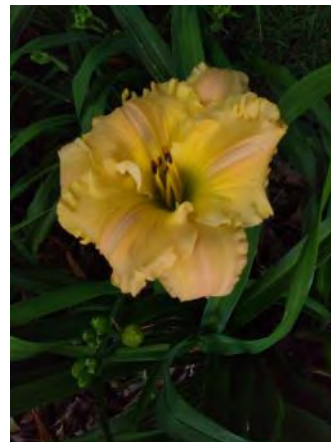
bottle of water with you to create the same effect.

Here are a couple of tricks for better, more accurate color in your images. I had one yellow daylily that the color was coming out too light. With just a slight tilt of the camera,

the color changed dramatically and was more accurate. Another trick I learned several years ago when I was in a Photography Club and using Adobe Photoshop was to hold a piece of white paper on the edge of the shot where it can be cropped out later. If this doesn't improve the color, you could use the "remove color cast" feature in Photoshop by clicking on something either white, black, or gray to correct the color. This particular trick really



Color difference-a simple tilt of the camera  
PDC Seedling #BMR 16-C



Improve color by using a sheet of white paper  
*H. 'Patsy Carpenter'*, Carpenter-J, 2003



impressed a group recently when I was presenting a PowerPoint presentation on flower photography.

I hope some of these tips will improve your skills in taking photos with your mobile phone's camera. The real key to better photographs is **practice, practice, practice**. It doesn't cost anything but time. Delete whatever isn't good to free up space on your phone's memory. Don't forget to enter your best images in the American Daylily Society's annual photo contest. The deadline for entries is November 1 each year. For General Rules and Guidelines, follow this link:

<http://daylily.pictures/ahsphotocontest/>.

