FLOWER PHOTOGRAPHY

BEST PRACTICES FOR YOUR SUCCESS

“Look and think before opening the shutter.
The heart and mind are the true lens of the camera”.

Yousuf Karsh - Olympus Camera

Why Do We Photograph?

- It’s part of who we are and as necessary as breathing
- Capturing a moment in time that lives on
- Creating art for ourselves and others to enjoy
- Your photography creates a legacy and a window into who you are

Do You Want a Snapshot or a Photograph ?

- Snapshots are spur of the moment without planning or forethought
- A photograph requires planning/forethought
- A photograph tells a stronger story
- A photograph requires the photographer to study the subject and apply their photographic knowledge and skill to capture it

What is Involved in Creating a Photograph?

- A desire to create beautiful imagery
- A subject that draws your attention
- The willingness to learn about your subject and how best to photograph it/them
- The willingness to explore new options in lighting, technique and equipment

Why Photograph Flowers ?

- The Challenge . . .
  - Like most ”subject specific” photography, flower photography has its challenges and rewards
- Looking to stretch your photographic experience
- Desire / Vision
  - You seem to be drawn by flowers and you want to capture their beauty

What is Required to Photograph Flowers?

- Camera and lens capable of capturing your vision or perspective
- Light
  - Filtered Daylight (not direct sunlight)
  - Artificial Light
  - On/Off Camera Flash

What Type of Camera Should I Use?

- DSLR with appropriate lens, extension tube, or close-up filter
- Point & Shoot with the ability to get close-up of flower
- Smart Phone with the ability to get close-up of flower

What Type Lens Should I Use?

- Macro Lens
- Lensbaby Lenses/Optics
- Telephoto Lens
- Most any lens can be used with extension tubes or close-up filters

Best Practices for Photographing Flowers

- Rule of Thirds is a good place to start but only if it makes good sense for the subject matter

Best Practices for Photographing Flowers

- In camera cropping is preferable to cropping in post- production but either with either method, ensure that there is an area of focus that draws the eye

Best Practices for Photographing Flowers

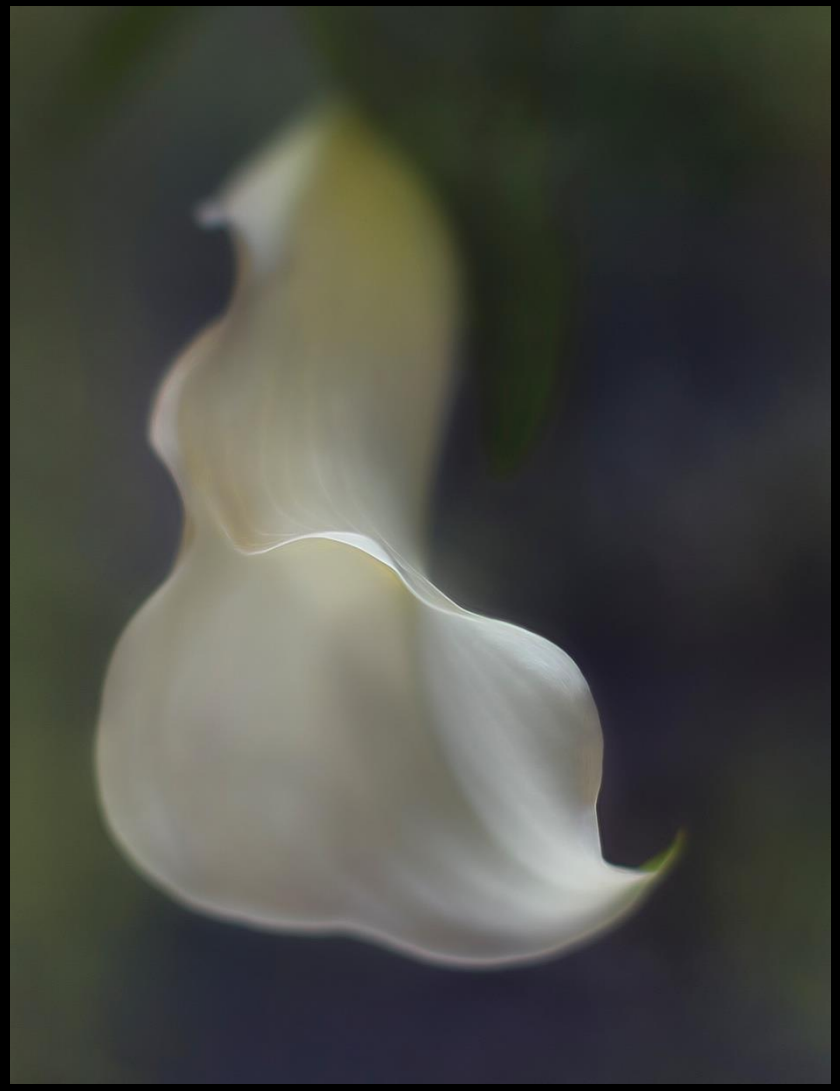
- Be careful not to have the stem of the flower emanate directly from a corner. Place stems to left/right of a corner.

Best Practices for Photographing Flowers

- Get Close !
- But the closer you get to the flower, the area of focus will become narrower

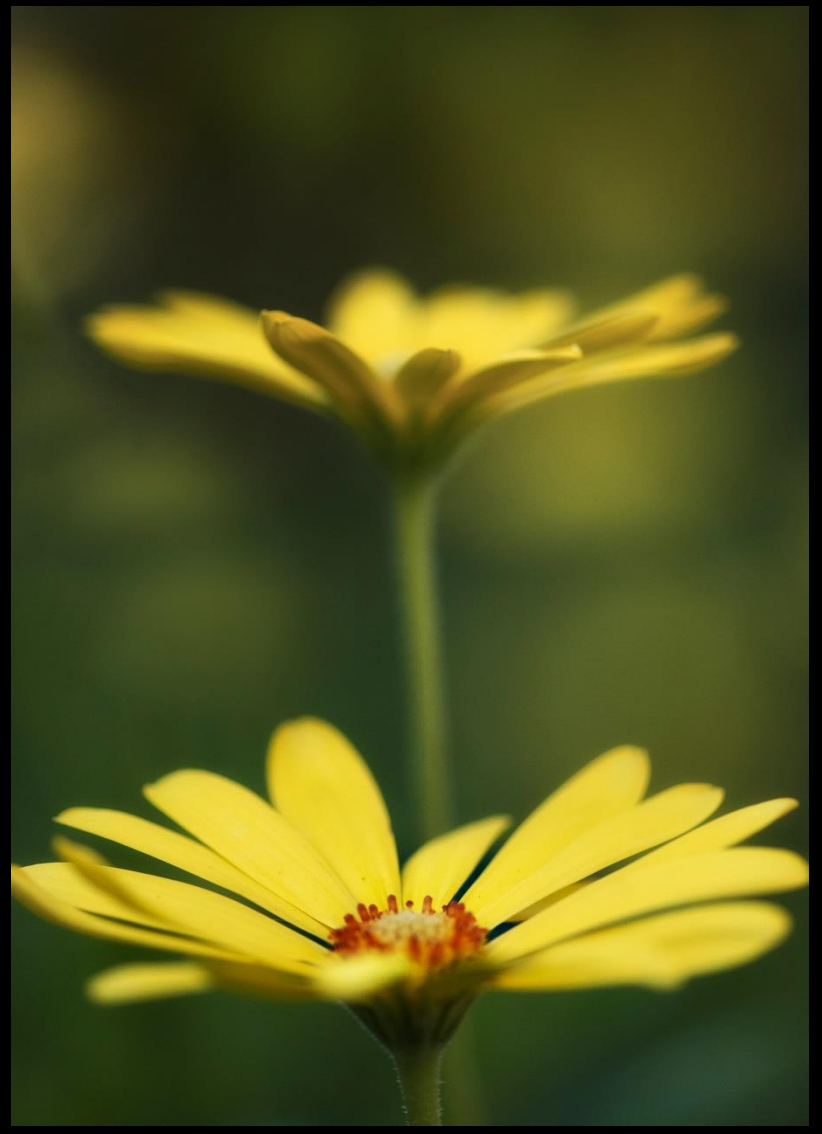
Best Practices for Photographing Flowers

- Look for something unique or interesting about the flower to focus on
- It’s your story to tell, so draw the viewer into your image with focus



Best Practices for Photographing Flowers

- It is usually best to focus on the part of the flower closest to the lens



Best Practices for Photographing Flowers

- Avoid distractions in foreground or background of image. Crop in camera to remove/reduce distractions in foregrounds.
- If distractions are unavoidable, fix the problem in post-production.

Best Practices for Photographing Flowers

- Every flower has a personality – strive to capture its essence!

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Light Is Necessary to Record What We See

"There is no bad light.

There is spectacular light and difficult light.

It's up to you to use the light you have"

... Jay Maisel

Light is Key #1

Types of Light

- Daylight
  - Filtered light is best – remember, direct sunlight creates harsh shadows and creates “hot spots”
  - Do not photograph the flower if you have to point your lens into the sun (unless you have fill-flash)
  - Avoid photography flowers in direct sun as it creates harsh shadows on the petals

Types of Light

- Fill-Flash
  - Try to bounce the flash so that you don’t get hot spots on the flower
  - Use fill-flash to balance dark areas/shadows when outdoors

Types of Light

- Artificial Light
  - Use indoors or outdoors to add light in dark areas of flowers or when you need to increase your shutter speed
  - Shine light from underneath the flower to give the flower glow

Combating Strong Light or Lack of Light

- Use a diffuser (of any size) or a white umbrella to block strong light from your flower
  - Umbrellas are very useful when you are shooting by yourself
- Diffusers not only block sunlight but they can reflect very soft, broad light onto the flower if the flower is backlit

Combating Strong Light or Lack of Light

- Use a reflector to add soft light to your flower. Remember that gold reflectors add warmth to the image and silver reflectors add cool to the image
- Bounce sunlight, LED light or the the light from on/off camera flash into the diffuser or reflector to create broad, soft light for your flower
- Small LED flashlights can be used to add spotlighting to your flower

Focus Draws the Viewer's Attention

"Before you can focus your camera you must focus yourself.

Slow down, become aware of your surroundings,

and you will begin to see with your heart!"

... R Lalonde

Focus Key #2

Perspective and Focus

- Not every flower is at eye level. Sometimes you need to sit down
- Work your subject! Photograph it from every conceivable angle

Perspective and Focus

- You don't have to photograph the entire flower – be creative!
- Sometimes you have to separate your subject from a background that is too close to avoid distraction
- Add a little tilt as you focus to get a creative crop
  - Warning: a "little" tilt goes a long, long way

Aperture and Focus

- Aperture as defined in Webster's Dictionary: a space through which light passes in an optical or photographic instrument, especially the variable opening by which light enters a camera
- Make sure you know how to select aperture and move the focus point in your camera

Aperture Choice = Focus Choice

- Set your camera to Aperture Priority (or Manual)
- Never use Auto Mode or Shutter Priority Mode to photograph flowers
- Always move your focus point to exactly what you want to focus on

Aperture Choice = Focus Choice

- Aperture wide open (small f/stop#) allows in more light and decreases depth of field (creates shallow focus – image has more blur and less focus

Aperture Choice = Focus Choice

- Aperture stopped down (larger f/stop) allows in less light and increases depth of field (creates deep focus – image has less (or no) blur and more focus

Where Should you put the Focus Point

- Focus on the part of the flower that you want to draw the eye to

Where Should you put the Focus Point

- Vary your focus point to see what works best for the flower

Selective Focus is Key for Flowers

- Flowers photographed with selective focus have blurred foregrounds or backgrounds.

Selective Focus Rules for Macro Lenses

- It is often wise to focus on the portion of the flower closest to the lens
- So, even at f/2.8 (or f/3.2), there is a good focus on the front of the flower

Selective Focus Rules for Macro Lenses

- With macro or close-focus lenses, the closer you get to your subject the more blur you will get
- So, even at f/8 there is a good amount of blur in this image

Selective Focus Rules for Telephoto Lenses

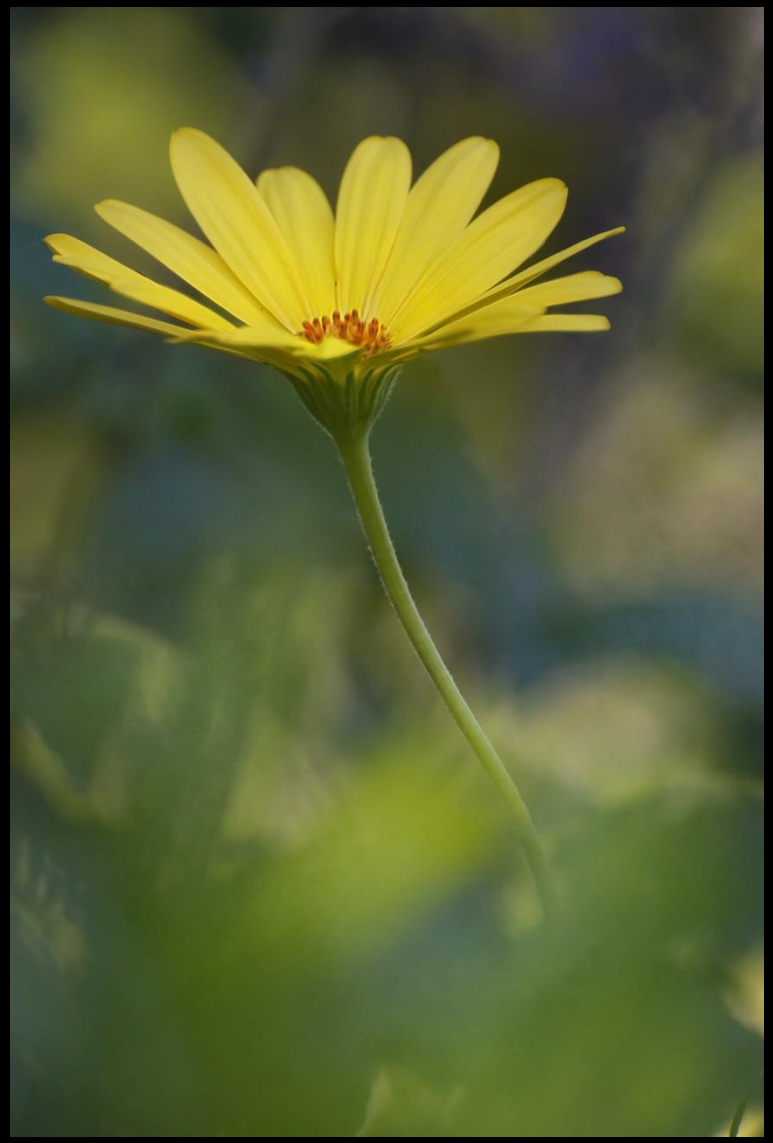
- Know the minimum focus distance of your lens and use extension tubes to get closer, if necessary
- Due to the compression factor in telephoto lenses, you can get the entire flower in focus with nice background blur, even at f/8

Change Your Position when you are Focusing

- Photograph the flower from every conceivable angle and height
- Capture the flower in both horizontal and vertical orientations
- Change your position to avoid distractions !!!
- Photograph the same subject with every lens you have at every aperture available on the lens to learn what it can and cannot do

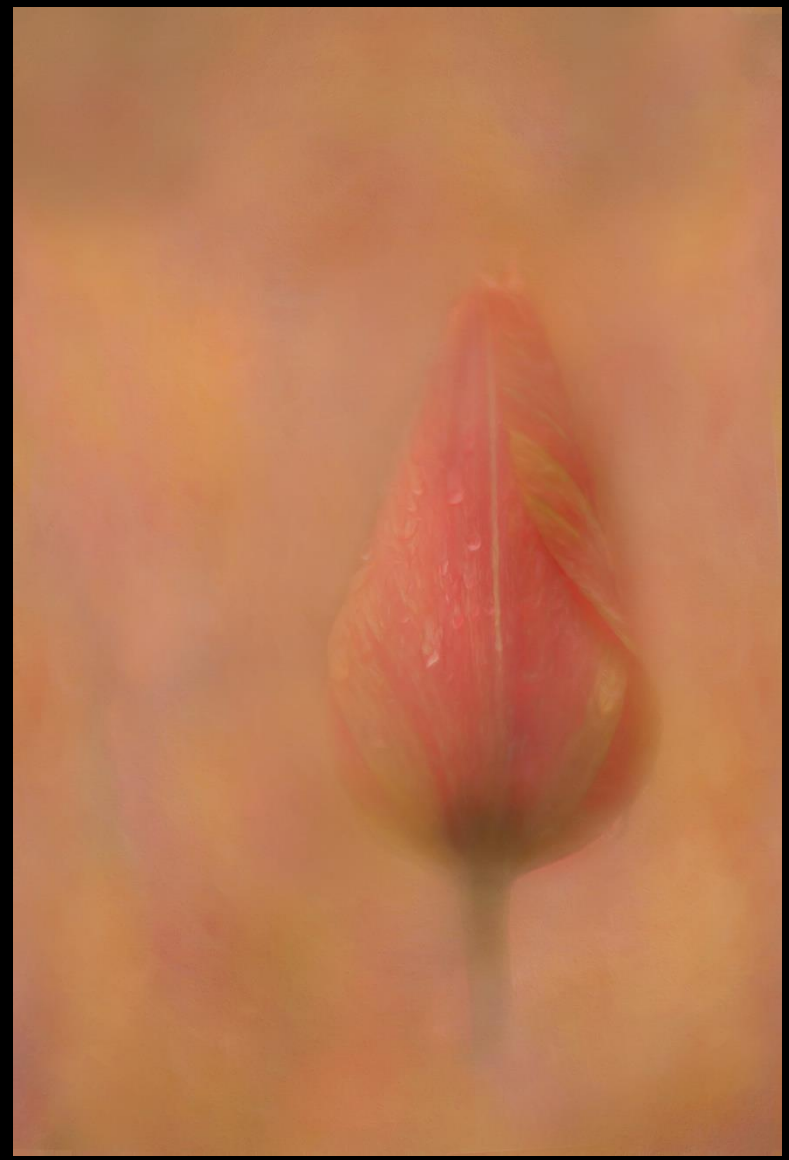
Shoot-Through Techniques

- Shoot through flowers, leaves, fern, etc., to create blur
  - Blurs background
  - Isolates a single flower
  - Hides distractions



Shoot-Through Techniques

- Use tulle in front of your lens and shoot through to your subject
  - Tulle can also be used to blur a background or hide distractions
  - Tulle works best if it is thick/stiff
  - Tulle should be in the same color family as flower or background



Defocus Technique

- Set your camera to manual focus and deliberately defocus the image
- Use this image as a texture behind a flower

Defocus Technique

- Return to auto focus, find the optimum focus point and take a second image
- Used blurred image as a background layer for other images or combine the defocused and focused images in Photoshop for a soft, dreamy effect
    - This technique works best if you are shooting on a tripod but can work handheld

Shake and Zoom Blur Technique

- With your camera in Shutter Priority (or Manual Mode), choose a slower shutter speed and a mid-range aperture (5.6 to 8). As you click the shutter, shake your body (which shakes the camera)

Shake and Zoom Blur Technique

- Do this several times moving the camera left to right or top to bottom
- If you have a zoom lens, with your camera at the same settings used for the “shake” technique above, zoom your lens in or out while clicking the shutter

In Camera Multiple Exposure

- Use camera's menu to set Multiple Exposure. Select "Auto Gain" if available
- With your camera in Aperture Priority or Manual Mode, set an appropriate DOF for the flower. Now set your camera to the fastest shooting mode (usually continuous – 5 frames/sec or higher)
- Find a center point to focus on, then, while holding down your shutter for 3 to 7 frames, turn your entire camera 180 degrees

Problems with Shooting JPG

- Smaller file size – fewer pixels
- Can work well if you are spot-on with exposure
- Images can be over saturated or contrasty

Use RAW Setting

- Helps with adjusting mid-tones and overall exposure and allows you to compensate for less than perfect exposure in post production (Light Room, Adobe Camera Raw)
- Definitely requires post production because images are ”flat” out of camera
- Allows your images to be printed in very large format without degradation

Find Inspiration

- Join a good Facebook group where talented photographers share their photos
- Visit websites of talented photographers
- View only images that draw you and learn from them

Closing Thoughts

- Ansel Adams said, “you don’t take a picture, you
- make a picture”
- • Truer words were never spoken – make use of
- camera techniques *and* photo-finishing techniques to make the very most of your flower
- Find your inner artist, and let her shine!

Consider Floral Arts Education

- Join The Joy of Flower Photography FB Group to see member's inspiring photos
- Join The Floral Arts Hub to interact with myself and members.
  - Many opportunities to learn, watch videos, and receive encouragement and direction in floral artistry

Visit: thefloralartshub.com

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