

*100 Tips to
Improve Your Flower
and Garden Photography*

By David Cobb



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Table of Contents

Introduction	4
Chapter 1: Photographing the Garden Landscape	5
Chapter 2: General Tips for Plants and Gardens	50
Chapter 3: Close-up Garden Photography	75
About the Author	108





Introduction

Over the years I've conducted a number of garden photography workshops, or helped people one-on-one and given a number of talks and presentations to various garden groups. This e-book strives to answer some of the many and most common questions I've received along the way; questions from the general to the specific.

As you explore this book, you'll see that each tip has a corresponding image. In addition, you'll find the specs for the particular image and information about how I photographed that particular image. From this perspective you'll get a "feel" for what was going through my mind (technically and creatively) when I took the shot.

The book begins with tips for a wider landscape view, then proceeds to more general tips and creative ideas, and finishes by looking at the smaller things with a micro or macro lens. This is also the process I use when photographing a garden. I usually arrive early and begin with a wider landscape overview, and then narrow my field of focus as the sun rises, and finally work the shadows for the smaller details as the sun gets higher in the sky.

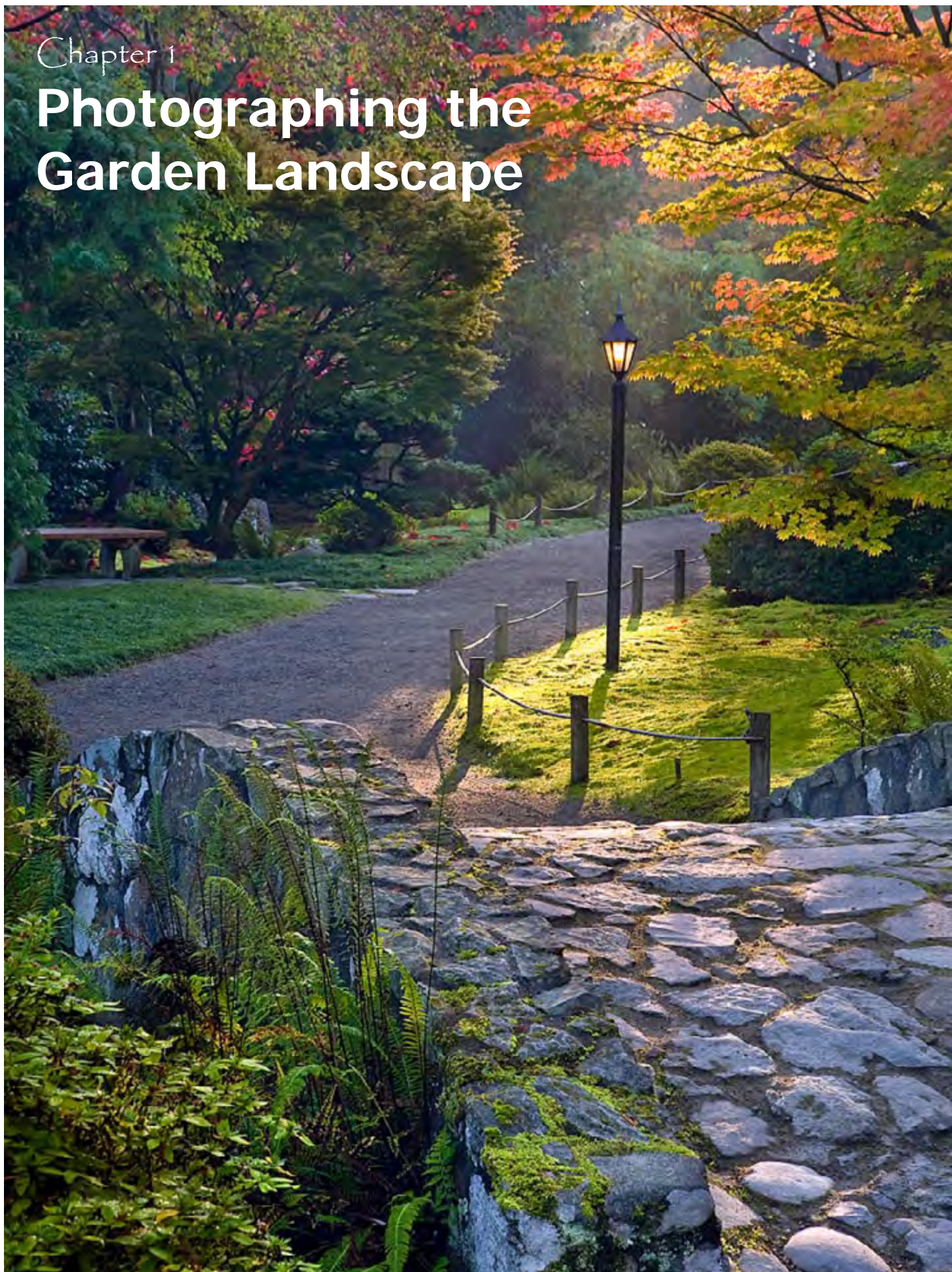
I hope you enjoy this e-book and find helpful ideas and inspiration for your garden photography fun. If you want to give me feedback about this ebook, you're welcome to contact me via email, Facebook, Twitter, or G+.

Sincerely,

David Cobb

Chapter 1

Photographing the Garden Landscape





Walk around and get to know the garden before you begin shooting

It sounds simple, but it really works—take the time to know the garden or subject first. Look for interesting angles and the variety of plants the garden has to offer. A photographer needs to be familiar with the landscape before they begin shooting. If a garden is new to me I often visit it the evening prior to my shoot, so that in the morning I have an idea of the lay of the land. Planning your shots ahead of time for the best light helps eliminate the element of surprise.



Canon EOS 5DiIII, EF 24-70mm lens, ISO 100, 1 sec at f16, CPL

A client hired me to photograph her garden and I took my time to get to know it before starting to photograph. As we walked the garden she told me the story of its formation, and from this I was able to pick up clues to those special areas of the garden that meant so much to her. I also studied the angles, the foregrounds, and the variety of plants within the garden landscape. Walking around without a camera gave me a better feel for what I was about to shoot.

2

Start with overview or landscape shots and work your way down to macro shots

Consider starting with an image that introduces a viewer to the garden. An overview shot can help accomplish this. It's also a good idea to shoot a larger landscape while the light is best, and then work your way down to the smaller landscapes and macro images as the light gets too bright for a wider view.



Canon EOS 5Diii, EF 24-70mm lens, ISO 100, .4 sec at f16, CPL

There are a number of different gardens at the Duncan Gardens in Spokane, but this classical garden has a nice perch to start from where you can get an overview before getting into the nitty-gritty of shooting the rest of the garden. Here, I shot an establishing shot first in order to get to know the garden a bit more before looking for those detailed shots.

3

Look for light, color, form and expression, and don't take a shot without one of these elements

This is the best way to look for great garden images; whether it is a beautiful bloom, soft morning light, a butterfly, or repeating patterns to add rhythm to the image. Looking for light, form, color, and expression is the best way to think about your shot.



Canon EOS 5D, EF 24-70mm lens, ISO 100, .8 sec at f22, CPL

I'm always looking for the play of light, patterns, insects, wildlife, leading lines and mostly color when I'm photographing in a garden. This image captures light, color, form, but no expression. If you can capture 2 or 3 of these elements, you've got a pretty good shot.

4

Simplify, Simplify, Simplify



You don't need to represent the whole garden at once in your photo, so think about telling bits of the story instead. So consider simplifying your shots to create a clearer message to your viewer.

When Thoreau wrote "Simplify, simplify, simplify" he could have been talking about photography. For this image, I had recently been viewing Japanese block art prints and Chinese tapestries and they influenced my sense of composition to simplify. I was happy with how well the layered result worked.

Canon EOS 5D, EF 70-200mm lens, ISO 100, .4 sec at f8, CPL

5

Foreground, Foreground, Foreground



The best way to lead the eye into an image is to use foreground, and the warmer colors like red, orange, and yellow make great anchors for your shot. Large garden boulders or interesting textures also create wonderful foregrounds.

A tree above lost most of its leaves, but the color and patterns they made on the moss were beautiful, and a perfect scattered foreground to lead the eye right up to the distant Japanese maple.

Canon EOS 5D, EF 24-70mm lens, ISO 200, 6 sec at f16 CPL

6

Look for leading lines in a garden



Most gardens have plenty of leading lines to help create the illusion of 3D and lead the viewer's eye into the frame. Sidewalks, pathways, fences, stepping stones, and bridges are all leading lines that create a more dynamic view for the image.

These parallel lines of heather, lawn, and pathway at the Abkhazi Garden in Victoria, B.C. helps lead the eye back to the distant garden house.

Canon EOS 5D, EF 24-70mm lens, ISO 250, 1/10 sec at f16, CPL

7

Always use a tripod when photographing a garden

There is nothing better to create a tack-sharp image than using a tripod. I always use one when photographing a garden landscape.



Canon EOS 5DiIii, EF 24-70mm lens, ISO 100, .8 sec at f22, CPL

Some gardens prohibit the use of tripods, which can hinder photography. I find that a tripod slows me down and makes my compositions more deliberate. A tripod also helps if you need to bracket your image and blend it later for high-dynamic range. For this image, using a tripod helped me slow down and compose a complex scene into a simpler garden image.

8

Shoot when there is no wind

It's just much easier to photograph a garden when the wind isn't blowing the trees and plants to-and-fro. Your images will be crisper and you're likely to have more success. Mornings are best if you're looking for less of a breeze. (See #12)



Canon EOS 5D, EF 24-70mm lens, ISO 100, .8 sec at f22, CPL

This image from the Denver Botanic Garden was shot near sunset. I usually prefer mornings to catch a garden when there is no wind, but I was here in the afternoon and there was nary a breeze. This scene would be much more difficult to capture during a windy day, but it was much easier to capture during this windless afternoon.

9

Look for evenly lit days and avoid bright, high-contrast light

In the Pacific Northwest where I live, there are a lot of cloudy days; I take advantage of those times to photograph in the garden. Even soft light creates a sense of balance to the image and cuts down on bright distractions for the eye.



Canon EOS 5DiIii, EF 24-70mm lens, ISO 100, .5 sec at f22, CPL

This image was taken at the Oregon Gardens after a light sprinkle had saturated the plants and flowers. I find the even light on overcast days much more productive than the days of high sun, high contrast, and glare.

10

Photograph on foggy days

Fog adds an air of mystery to the garden photograph and simplifies the image by eliminating distracting background images. To give the illusion of more fog leave the aperture open longer, and for less fog choose a faster shutter speed.



Canon EOS 5D, EF 24-70mm lens, ISO 100, 2 sec at f16, CPL

I still use a polarizer on foggy and cloudy days; this is to cut down on leaf reflection and help saturate the fall color. You can make a foggy day look foggier by keeping the aperture open longer or less foggy by keeping it open a shorter time. For this image two seconds was long enough to obscure the background distractions of a wall, a van, and more trees and shrubs. The fog kept the composition simpler and cleaner.



Utilize atmospheric bounce light and take your photograph pre-dawn

About a half an hour both before sunrise and after sunset the sun below the horizon bounces off the sky above and redirects down to the land below. This soft light is difficult to detect, but it is a beautiful time to photograph light, shadow and detail.



Canon EOS 5D, EF 24-70mm lens, ISO 200, 1.3 sec at f22, CPL

When visiting the Cheekwood Botanical Garden in Nashville, Tennessee, I arrived before sunrise to photograph for the book "Quiet Beauty: Japanese Gardens of North America." This allowed me to take advantage of the pre-dawn bounce-light off of the atmosphere and the stillness of the scene. The soft glow on the cherry blossoms is from the soft glow in the air before sunrise. There is the "golden hour," but about a half-hour before sunrise and after sunset exists some of the nicest soft light a camera can pick up on its sensor.



The soft light of morning is, in my view, the best time to photograph. At this time of day you can also take advantage of fewer people in the garden and the lack of wind (see #8).

For this morning garden image I wasn't worried about wind blowing the cactus around, but the soft light of sunrise was much better here than the harsher afternoon light you find in Mexico.

Canon EOS 5Diii, EF 24-70mm lens, ISO 100, 6 sec at f22, CPL

13

Photograph during the “golden hour”

The golden hour for photography is that time just before sunset or just after sunrise when the light is warm and shadows are long. This is a great time to catch backlighting in the garden or some marvelous side-lighting. It’s also a great time to set your camera at f22 and line the sun up with a tree branch to catch a nice sun star in the garden.



Canon EOS 5D, EF 24-70mm lens, ISO 100, .8 sec at f22, CPL

The sunlight was low, filtered, and soft when I took this image at the Denver Botanical Garden in Colorado. It was the golden hour of sunset with some of the best garden light I’ve witnessed. If you can catch soft light, with long shadow, and low contrast for your garden image, you almost can’t lose.

14

Use colors with visual weight to anchor your foreground



Canon EOS 5D, EF 24-70mm lens, ISO 200, 1/4 sec at f16, CPL

Warmer hues of the color wheel like red, yellow, and orange have much more visual weight than cooler hues of the color wheel (like blue, indigo, and green) and make great anchors for a foreground subject. The eye will start at the bottom of the image and drift to the garden's background, thus creating an illusion of three dimensions for your two-dimensional image.

The beautiful Japanese Garden at the Tillman Reclamation Plant in Van Nuys, California had a lot of azaleas in bloom when I stopped by to photograph. For this image I used the red blossoms to anchor my foreground and let the stream lead the eye back to the distant egrets.

15

Use form to anchor your foreground

Shape can also be used to anchor a foreground. A beautiful stone, a sculpture, or maybe an interestingly formed cactus can all be used as foreground elements in a garden landscape image.



Canon EOS 5D, EF 24-70mm lens, ISO 200, 2.5 sec at f22, CPL

At the Denver Botanic Garden I used this intricate stone path to anchor the eye to the foreground, and the "S" curve of the path leads the eye into the recesses of the garden.

16

Look for "S" curves in garden landscape photography



Look for "S" curves as an interesting element to carry your eye through the frame and create an illusion of three dimensions in a two-dimensional image.

Notice how everything lined up here at the Morikami Japanese Garden in Del Rey Beach, Florida. The blooms in the front anchor the eye and the blooms in back bring the eye into the scene with an "S"-shaped garden path that leads you from the front color to the background color.

Canon EOS 5D, EF 24-70mm lens, ISO 100, .6 sec at f22, CPL

17

Look for “C” curves in garden landscape photography



Look for “C” curves as an interesting element to carry your eye through the frame and create an illusion of three dimensions in a two-dimensional image.

I caught this arch of shrubs late in the day at the Morikami Japanese Garden in Del Rey Beach, Florida. The arch is interesting in itself, but I also liked the “C” curve of the path that creates curiosity about what’s around the corner.

Canon EOS 5D, EF 24-70 mm lens, ISO 100, 2.5 sec at f16, CPL

18

Photograph the vertical line



Vertical lines give a sense of power and strength to a composition, and they can also point the way to your main subject

Waiting for the gates to open at the Shofuso Garden in Philadelphia, I took a stroll through Fairmont Park. I loved this gazebo and walk lined with flower beds and how they combined to form a powerful vertical line for my subject.

Canon EOS 5D, EF 70-200mm lens, ISO 100, 5 sec at f16, CPL

19

Photograph horizontal lines within the garden for a more restful image

Horizontal lines can add peacefulness to an image. Since gardens are usually a peaceful place to be, this is a good feeling to convey in a photograph.



Canon EOS 5DiIii, EF 24-70mm lens, ISO 400, 20 sec at f22

This early morning at the Portland Japanese Garden in Oregon was taken when there were few people about, and I wanted to convey how peaceful it was in the garden. By photographing the pavilion and the horizontally shaped stones of the grounds, this image expresses peacefulness and sturdiness with a sense of balance and symmetry.

20

Look for corridors when photographing in a garden

There are plenty of corridors in garden settings; maybe an area lined with trees, a long arbor, or a bamboo forest like you see in this image. A corridor can draw the eye into the frame, especially if it leads to a chair or a person. It also creates a sense of mystery for the viewer, sparking them to ask "what's around the next bend?"



Canon EOS 5D, EF 24-70mm lens, ISO 100, 6 sec at f22, CPL

This image taken at the Hakone Garden in Saratoga, California shows a corridor through a bamboo forest. I liked the slight "C" curve to this image and the repeating lines of bamboo. The kicker for me was the empty bench near the end of the pathway.

21

Pay attention to which way your lines go: left-to-right are calming and right-to-left can cause compositional tension.



Looking down on the Sunken Garden at the Butchart Garden in Victoria, Canada I loved the pathway and all the spring flowers in bloom. It's quite a peaceful scene. With the image flipped it seems to cause a bit of tension in the composition. Why? I don't know.

*Canon EOS 5D, EF 24-70mm lens, ISO 100,
1 sec at f22, CPL*

I don't know why this is true, but lines that go from right-to-left in compositions usually cause more tension than ones that go from left-to-right. Maybe for those of us who grew up in western society, it has something to do with how we read from left to right—maybe not. Your compositional lines can go either way, but be aware of how they might cause tension or not when framing your image.



22

Use layering to create dimension in the composition

Layering is a compositional tool which helps create a dynamic image by offering a sense of scale and depth, and adding elements that create eye movement within the frame. I love using this approach on foggy days to also generate a sense of distance within the image.



Canon EOS 5D, EF 24-70mm lens, ISO 200, ¼ sec at f16, CPL

This particular morning in Van Nuys, California was a hazy one and there was a bit of fog rising up from the garden pond. I decided to use the azaleas as an interesting foreground, but as I shot through the morning mist I noticed the other overlapping elements that helped add depth to the image.

23

Compose with symmetry

If you draw a vertical or horizontal line through the middle of the image and both sides mirror each other, you've created symmetry in your composition. This helps balance the composition, but can also be compositionally dull. Adding a small object as juxtaposition in the composition will introduce tension and also add more interest. Try it both ways and see which you prefer.



*Canon EOS 5Diii, EF 16-35mm lens, ISO 200, 1 sec at f16, CPL
(a channel blend of two images for dynamic range)*

On this Texas morning there was some nice color in the sky bouncing light down towards the backlit paintbrush. The woman who owned this property graciously let us photograph her beautiful wildflowers. I loved the soft light and the morning mist, but to me this image is mostly about symmetry and balance.

24 *Use a zoom lens*

I love to isolate portions of the garden with a zoom lens, which also comes in handy when photographing flowers and looking for that perfect soft background.



Canon EOS 5D, EF 70-200mm lens, ISO 100, .5 sec at f16, CPL

When photographing this fall scene at the Brooklyn Botanic Garden in New York, I loved the glancing light on the distant tree with its reflection, and the Torii gate made it that much better. I needed to keep the sky and other distractions out of the frame, so a zoom worked perfectly to capture the image I wanted.

25

Use a fisheye lens



This is a great way to create a more dynamic image and produce a view that's rarely seen.

I had borrowed a Canon 15mm fisheye lens from a local vendor during this shoot at the Portland Japanese Garden. I placed the camera and lens about 3 inches above the stones and wanted to show them off as they led to the Pagoda Lantern. I didn't much care about the curvature of the land, but I did want the lantern to stand up straight. During this fall day I did something a bit different: and had fun doing it too.

Canon EOS 5D, EF 15mm lens, ISO 100, 1/6 sec at f8

26

Photograph the spring planting



*Canon EOS 5D, EF 100mm macro lens,
ISO 200, 1/8 sec at f18*

Spring is a great time to photograph the beginning of the gardening season when all that energy is in the air. It's also a great time to photograph the gardener in the garden while they're hard at work—or just taking a break from their daily chores.

Every year I plant a garden in my yard and then set about photographing it. A good way to improve your stock photography images is to photograph the different vegetables you plant in your own garden. It doesn't need to be artistic, but more of a record of what you plant. Don't have a good zucchini image? Plant some and then photograph them. Many publishers favor images of fruits and vegetables on the vine. Enjoy the time spent in your own garden and maybe make a few bucks at the same time.

27

Photograph the season's harvest

Flowers, fruits, vegetables—photograph harvest time in the yard or on a larger agricultural scale. This is a great time for patterns of shape and patterns of color.



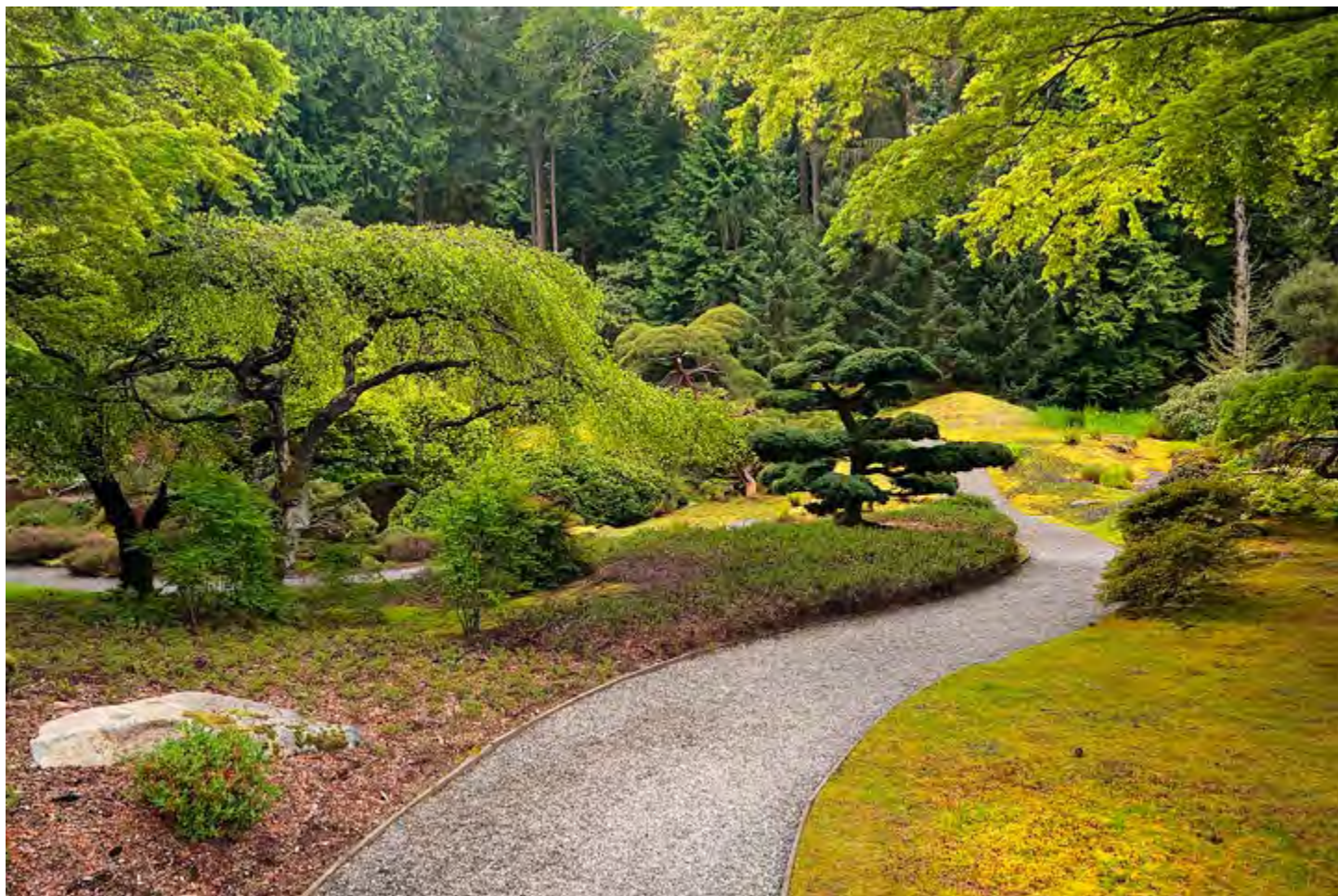
Canon EOS 5Diii, EF 100mm lens, ISO 100, 30 sec at f32, fill-flash set at -3, CPL

I was shooting for a client who needed some fruit images and they supplied me with a nice variety of apples and pears for the shots. I stacked some fruit on a plate to create some diversity in height, and surrounded the plate with fruit to fill in the holes. I also used a spray bottle of water for that fresh glistening look. I left a leaf on one apple to add to the natural look of the fruit. Natural light and a fill-flash were used on this image.

28

Eliminate the sky from your garden images

Consider eliminating or minimizing the evenly blue or the evenly gray sky from your composition—it adds nothing to the image. I rarely show the sky in my garden images since the shot is about the garden. For me, the sky in a garden composition is a distraction and wasted space.



Canon EOS 5D, EF 2470mm lens, ISO 100, 25 sec. at f22, CPL

When I photographed this garden image at the Bloedel Reserve on Bainbridge Island, Washington there was a bit of an overcast sky and a few sun breaks. I wanted to show those sun breaks on the garden and I didn't need to show the sky to reveal that. The backlit glow in the tree and on the moss was all I needed.

29

Photograph the gardener's work area



The area where gardeners work can add another dimension to your garden image. Since this is the place where a lot of work gets done and it's the gardener's personal space, it can reflect something about the gardener too. Is it organized, whimsical, busy, sparse, or clean in the off season?

Photographing a garden for a client, I liked the look of this workspace situated at the garden boundary. The area was organized, colorful, and had a number of young potted plantings ready to become part of the garden scenery. I used a polarizer here not only for leaf reflection, but also to cut down on the reflections from the watering can and window glass.

Canon EOS 5Diii, EF 24-70mm lens, ISO 125, 20 sec at f22, CPL

30

Photograph the garden lights during the holiday season

Many venues light up the garden during the holiday season, so this creates a wonderful opportunity to photograph a garden under different conditions. Use a tripod and not a flash for the best results, and don't worry about people getting in the way of your night photography either, because they'll just blur into nothingness. Try it and have some fun.



Canon EOS 5D, EF 24-70mm lens, ISO 100, 30 sec at f11

I love it when the gardens are lit up for the holidays, and I visit Shore Acres State Park in Oregon quite often to shoot their holiday lights display. For this image I looked for color to frame the distant house, and the variety of red, green, and blue worked well.

31

Take a similar image under different conditions and in different seasons



I photograph similar scenes every season to capture the change of the year, and I love how the scene looks under different conditions. I never know when a buyer may want to use an image of mine under different conditions, so I come prepared.



The Harp Tuner Lantern at the Portland Japanese Garden in Oregon is my favorite lantern at the garden, so I return every season to photograph it as a vertical and horizontal.

Images photographed with various cameras at various settings.

32

Photograph trees in the garden

There are so many beautiful trees in a garden setting. Look at their form, catch them when they blossom, catch them in the various seasons, or show their beauty in the snow. When you do photograph your favorite garden tree, don't forget to use a polarizer to cut down on leaf glare.



Canon EOS 5D, EF 70-200mm lens, ISO 200, 1/10 sec at f11, CPL

Peak bloom in a good year is a great time to photograph the Weeping Cherry tree at the Portland Japanese Garden. There were so many blossoms on this tree I zoomed in to compress them and also create an illusion for the brain to imagine even more blossoms. I used a polarizer to cut down on reflective light from the blooms, and kept the trunk dead-center to convey the sturdiness of this old tree.

33

Photograph people in the garden

Part of the fun of gardens is seeing how people interact with them. Their enjoyment, relaxation, or work within a garden is all part of the experience, so photographing people in a garden is a natural step to capturing a piece of a garden's story.



Canon EOS 5D, EF 24-70mm lens, ISO 200, 1/25 sec at f5.6, CPL

While wandering the Denver Botanical Garden, I strolled down this path of beautiful peonies and a woman at the end of the path was drawing and painting them. A great way to enjoy a garden setting! With her big straw hat it reminded me of an impressionistic painting, so I chose a shallow aperture so the flowers and woman would fade to softness.

34

Photograph wildlife in the garden

Wildlife is also part of the garden experience, so capture how it interacts with your natural world.



Canon EOS 5Diii, EF 24-70mm lens, ISO 1000, 1/50 sec at f6.3, CPL

While I was teaching a workshop at the Denver Botanical Garden this beautiful little Red Fox wandered across the garden grounds and posed nicely for us. When wildlife wanders into the garden, I immediately change my ISO to at least 400, but on this gray day I made it an even 1000. The faster speed enabled me to capture a sharper fox image.



Canon EOS 5Diii, EF 70-200mm lens, ISO 2000, 1/250 sec at f5, CPL

Many people own pets who venture into the garden, so record how they “help” enhance the garden experience.

On our back deck we take care of a number of feral cats throughout the year (and get them fixed so we don’t have more feral cats running around!). Our kitten “Hiro” was making a mess out of this hydrangea, so I photographed her “helping” in the garden. This photo was shot handheld, so I needed a quick enough speed to keep the image sharp. I turned up my ISO to 2000 and chose a shallow depth-of-field. Even though the polarizer slowed things down a bit, I kept it on to cut down on the reflective leaf glare.



Canon EOS 5D, EF 24-70mm lens, ISO 200, .3 sec at f22, CPL

Many gardens incorporate water features into their landscaping including fountains, pools, ponds, streams, or cascades. Be sure to integrate these features into your garden photos. For that silky water effect, use a tripod and capture the water movement at $\frac{1}{4}$ second or slower.

The Neptune Fountain is a dominant feature of the courtyard garden at Cerro Santa Lucia in Santiago, Chile, so I wanted to include a photograph of it during my travels there. For this image I raised the ISO and shot at f22 to find the sweet spot for the water. I also attached a circular polarizer to my lens to cut down on reflective glare from the fountain and water.

37

Photograph garden structures

Garden structures and buildings are often an integral and important part of a garden. By including them in your captures you're telling a piece of the story of the garden you photograph. If there are windows on the structure or shingles on its roof, use a polarizer to dampen the reflections.



Canon EOS 5D, EF 24-70mm lens, ISO 200, 30 sec at f16, CPL

Many Japanese gardens include structures like a tea house and a Pavilion, and I love the ones here at the Japanese garden in the Bloedel Reserve. The greenery covers the pavilion nicely and there is a harmony between the structure and garden which is captured in this image.

38

Photograph garden art

I love photographing the beauty of art in the garden setting. If the art is weathered it might provide interesting color or textures. This also might be an area where the gardener expresses a sense of whimsy, so it's fun to capture this part of the personality of the garden. Art in the garden does say something about the gardener too, so don't forget to capture that part of the story.



Canon EOS 5DiIii, EF 24-70mm lens, ISO 320, .4 sec at f16, CPL

I loved this whimsical garden sculpture playing the sax amongst the flowers—it added a bit of whimsy to the garden setting. For this image I needed a deeper depth-of-field, so I chose f16 and used a polarizer to cut down on leaf glare. The higher ISO made sure there wouldn't be any movement in the plant, allowing me to keep the sharpness.

39

Photograph during and after a rain shower

When a garden is moist it can feel so alive and smell so good. Photographing water droplets on the flowers is fun and challenging. If the sun peeks out, the garden can also sparkle with light—adding life to the image. Rain can also help saturate the colors of the garden, especially when the flowers or foliage are at peak in the spring or fall. Some of my best garden photographs were taken while it was raining. When it rains the colors are saturated, and overcast skies are great for even lighting. Put on some rain gear, cover your camera, use an umbrella, and get out and photograph in the rain!



Canon EOS 5D, EF 24-70mm lens, ISO 400, 13 sec. at f22, CPL

Sometimes I get my best garden images on rainy days, and for this image it was pouring outside. The rainfall darkened the tree trunks to almost silhouettes, and the rain saturated the fall colors on the trees, shrubs, and ground. I used a polarizer to cut down on leaf glare (yes, especially on a cloudy rainy day) and to help saturate the leaves. I upped the ISO to keep my image under 15 seconds, which was about as much time as I had between gusts of wind.

Look for reflective light in the water, especially during the fall or spring



Canon EOS 5D, EF 70-200mm lens, ISO 100, .3 sec at f16

As the garden gets too bright to photograph directly, start to look for indirect light in the garden setting. If the garden holds streams or small ponds, look at the reflections they cast. During the fall or spring you can capture some beautiful reflections, especially when the light is too “hot” for other types of garden photography.

The sun was getting higher in the sky near the end of my fall morning shoot at the Seattle Japanese Garden, so I began to look for reflections in the water. For this image I kept a portion of the filtered light on the land, but concentrated mostly on the reflective light on the water. This is one of those times I didn't polarize much when photographing, because I needed the light to reflect and a polarizer would have dampened that effect.

41

Use a Lensbaby® lens to make the familiar seem less familiar

I use a Lensbaby® for many things in my flora and garden photography, and one of the reasons is because I like to make the familiar look less familiar. For an out-of-the-ordinary look that is a bit more creative and a bit prettier, try this selective-focus lens to create unusual garden images.



Canon EOS 5D, Lensbaby 3G, ISO 100, 1/50 sec at f4

I spent a morning photographing the Lan Su Chinese Garden in Portland, Oregon with my typical lenses, but felt that this shot cried out for a Lensbaby lens. I felt the background buildings were a distraction to the image and interrupted the “feel” of the garden, so by using a Lensbaby I was able to blur the background buildings out of this garden and concentrate on the pond structure.

42

Contrast natural shapes with manmade shapes

Gardens are a great place to contrast the manmade with the natural, and the softness of the natural world next to the hardness of the manmade world creates an interesting juxtaposition and dynamic. Look for it when you can.



Canon EOS 5Diii, EF 70-200mm lens, ISO 200, 1 sec at f11

A Japanese garden is a great place to contrast manmade with the natural. Here in the Flat Garden of the Portland Japanese Garden I used my zoom lens to isolate the lantern against the green shrubbery and pine, capturing the harmony between man and nature.

43

Incorporate a view or borrowed scenery

In a Japanese garden, the garden designer will often incorporate borrowed views or borrowed scenery into the garden's design. These vistas are beautiful and sometimes spectacular, so photograph them when available.



Canon EOS 5D, EF 24-70mm lens, ISO 200, 1/10 sec at f16, CPL

At this Japanese garden in Santiago, Chile, the borrowed scenery is a view of downtown Santiago and the foothills of the Andes Mountains—pretty spectacular!

44

Shoot pano images

Stitching images together for a panoramic view of the garden can be challenging and fun. Sometimes a garden is vast and beautiful from end-to-end, so capture it in 3 to 4 photographs and stitch them together with software like Adobe Photoshop® or PTGui. When I photograph panos I overlap each image by about a third when stitching to be on the safe side, and I pay attention to keeping each image fairly level by using a tripod.

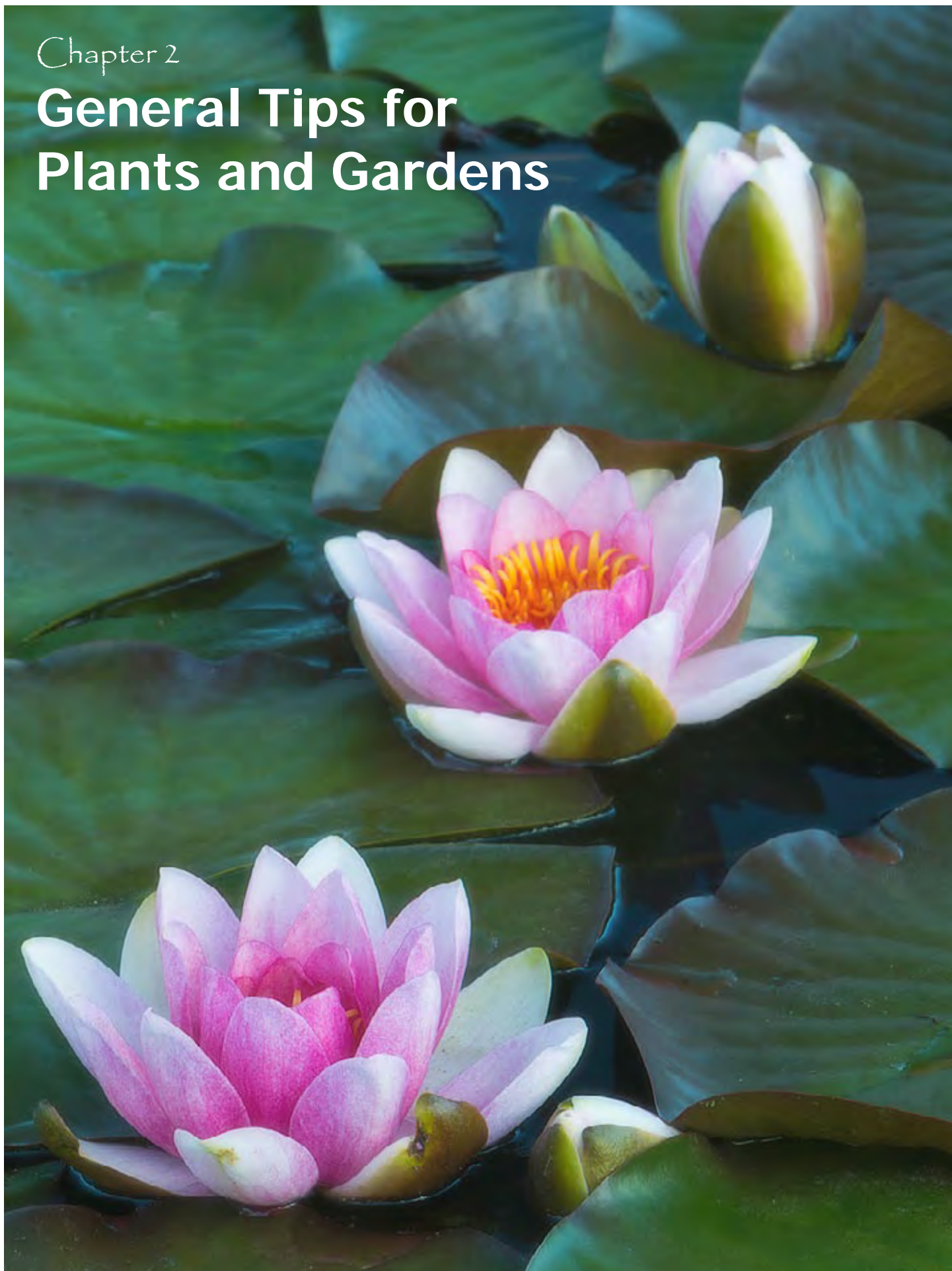


Canon EOS 5Diii, EF 24-70mm lens, ISO 100, 1 sec at f22, CPL

This pano image may look small on the page, but its true size is 27 inches long and 10 inches high at 300 pixels per inch. I took two images of the entry at the San Diego Japanese Friendship Garden and stitched them together in Photoshop by using the Automate/Photomerge settings.

Chapter 2

General Tips for Plants and Gardens



45

Use a polarizer to increase image saturation and to cut down on image reflection

This is especially helpful during the fall color season, when you can cut down on the reflective glare and increase the saturation to your image. I use a polarizer in the garden almost 100% of the time.



Canon EOS 5D, EF 70-200mm lens, ISO 320, 1/4 sec at f22, CPL

Polarizers work best when they're used at a 90-degree angle from the sun; and I use them in garden photography all the time. Even on cloudy days and when plants are green, I use a polarizer to cut down on reflective glare. On this shot it not only helped the greens, but help pop and saturate the tree blossoms too.

46

Look for backlighting

This kind of light and contrast is great for accentuating the needles on a poppy, the thorns on a rose, or the petal folds in a tulip field. In garden photography this type of lighting is perfect for capturing the highlights of fall color.



Canon EOS 5DiIII, EF 70-200mm lens, ISO 100, 1/5 sec at f11

Fall is my favorite time to look for backlighting, especially with aspen trees. When I spied the light shining through the leaves in Washington's Methow Valley, I knew I had some nice light to work with while pressing down the shutter button. The scene creates an interesting glow and sets up some pleasing contrast as well.

47

Use a fill-flash

Like a reflector, a fill-flash will help illuminate darker areas of the garden or help to light people in the garden. I also find that a reflector helps immensely when photographing structures or garden art that cast a shadow. If you set your flash around -3, it will fill an area with light while keeping a natural sense to the lighting. I also use this technique when photographing lanterns within a Japanese garden, as the lantern cap casts a dark shadow on the rest of the structure.



Canon EOS 5D, EF 24-70mm lens, ISO 100, 20 sec at f16, CPL, fill-flash

A large part of any Japanese garden is the tea house, and I love the one at the Portland Japanese Garden. I took two images here (one for the tea garden and one for the tea house) and channel blended them for high dynamic range. I used a fill-flash to cast a bit of light into the tea house, but I didn't want too much flash because then it would cast unnatural shadows along the upper beams.

48

Whether landscape or macro photography, always be aware of your background

Background can make or break a shot, especially in macro photography. It might sound counter-intuitive, but I often look for the background first and the flower second. Look for bright spots or black blobs that can distract the eye away from the intended subject.



***Canon EOS 5D, EF 70-200mm lens, ISO 320, 1/125 sec at f6.3,
Kenko Pro 2x teleconverter, Canon 500D close-up filter***

I like the look flower images give when I use a Canon 500D close-up filter in conjunction with a teleconverter. For this image I paid close attention to my background and loved the soft mix of out-of-focus soft red poppies blended with the green grass. I made sure there were no black blobs or any white glare that might distract the eye. This image was taken on a median between busy roads, so I cranked up my ISO and went with a shallow depth-of-field to keep the poppy in the foreground sharp.

49

Shoot horizontals and verticals of the same subject



This is always good practice and a good discipline to help with your compositional eye. By shooting one way and then the other it forces you to recompose and work the scene in a new and creative way. In addition you never know if a buyer wants a vertical or horizontal image, so it's always good to have both.

Both images: Canon EOS 5D, EF 24-70mm lens, ISO 100, 1.3 sec at f16, CPL

I photograph a lot at the Portland Japanese Garden since they're a client of mine, but I never know which image they might want to use. So I make it a practice to shoot both verticals and horizontals. Both of these images have been used to market the garden.



As the sun rises, narrow your field of focus to avoid areas of greater contrast



First light is a good time to take wider shots of a garden, and as the sun rises you can continually look for smaller and smaller compositions to avoid too much contrast on those brighter days. This also allows you to have a smaller field of view as more and more people file into the garden area. I work in reverse at sunset and create images encompassing a greater area of the garden as people begin to leave and as there is less area of contrast in an image due to the setting sun.

*Canon EOS 5D,
EF 24-70mm lens,
ISO 100, .8 sec at f22,
CPL*

As the sun rose while strolling around the Lan Su Chinese Garden in Portland, Oregon, my field of focus became smaller and smaller. I avoided high-contrast areas by sticking to the shadows with even light or bounce light. My eye settled on the pot filled with quince.

51

Use a frame within a frame when photographing



A great way to show depth and layering in garden photography is to shoot a frame within a frame, which is when something else within your composition frames another element in the composition. With all the trees, gates, arches, and arbors within a garden setting, framing within a frame is easy to do.

*Canon EOS 5D,
EF 24-70mm lens,
ISO 100, .8 sec at f22,
CPL*

I had to walk around to the back of the Shofuso Garden in Philadelphia and stick my lens between an iron-railed fence to get this image of the Tea House, but this cut-leaf maple frames the Tea House perfectly while also adding some dynamic form to the image.

52

Pay attention to the red channel on your histogram



Canon EOS 5Diii, EF 70-200mm lens, Kenko Pro 1.4x, ISO 100, 1.3 sec. at f32, CPL

When photographing a garden or a flower, make sure to pay attention to the red channel of your camera's histogram after you take a shot. It might look like you're not losing any detail when looking at the white histogram, but that's just an average of your red, green, and blue channels. If you're including red, orange, or yellow flowers when photographing a garden landscape image, then look at the red channel of your histogram. If it's going past or spiking off the right side of the histogram then you're losing detail in the red portions of your image, and it might look more like a red sheet with no detail than a red flower. Keep that red histogram from going off the right edge and keep the detail in your image.

There is a lot of orange in this Field & Oak image, and I needed to keep my red detail so I broke out my RGB histogram channels on my camera and made sure my red channel wasn't going too far right and losing detail in the orange area of this image. I captured the color and detail, and in conjunction with a zoom lens and teleconverter, I was able to give the "feel" I wanted in capturing so many wallflowers.

53

Shoot multiple exposures

Nikon, Canon digital SLRs, and definitely film cameras allow you to take more than one image on a frame, and this allows for some nice creative effects. I enjoy doing this while moving my camera slightly in the shape of a "V" with three exposures or in a shape of an "X" with five exposures, taking one photo for each cross-point or end point. This allows you to create beautiful impressionistic-like images with your garden photography.



Canon EOS 1V, EF 24-70mm lens, Fuji Velvia ISO 100, at f5.6 CPL, hand held

This image of garden tulips was created by taking 9 images on 1 frame, and underexposing by 3 stops. Between each shot I moved the camera and lens about ¼ inch and then shot again. With digital photography some cameras figure out all the settings for you, but check your manual to be sure.

54

Use creative blur in your photography

Creative blur can be done by panning your camera while the shutter is still open, or by taking more than one picture on a single frame while hand-holding your camera. I find this technique works best in spring and fall when the color of the garden is vibrant. Take your time and practice this technique, and most of all have fun with it.



Canon EOS 5D, EF 24-70mm lens, ISO 250, 1/6 sec at f16, CPL

I decided to imitate the motions of an impressionist's brush stroke when I took this image of brightly colored hyacinth at the Butchart Garden in Victoria, British Columbia. The small, hooked, circular motion worked well to blend the color and create bundles of hues, as opposed to focusing on flowers. For this image I got the effect I wanted.

55

Use the "Ortonizing" technique



With some cameras Ortonizing can be done in-camera; otherwise it can be done in Photoshop. By blurring and overexposing one image around 20% and stacking it with a straight shot of another (overexposed by 20%) you get that interesting patina. In the film days you needed to pry apart your slides and then sandwich them together and remount. It's much easier now.

*Canon EOS 5D,
EF 24-70mm lens,
ISO 100, 4 sec at f22,
CPL*

The original of this image taken at the Portland Japanese Garden seemed a bit flat for me, so I thought the Orton technique would help bring it to life. It worked better than I expected and also gave the image a more ancient feel.

56

Use a "soft-focus" filter



Singh-ray makes a soft-focus filter which can be useful when a dreamy effect is desired for an image. I also find that Nik Software's "Fog" filter plugin can have a similar effect when used with "Glamour Glow."

When taking this image I wanted to catch that soft daisy feel. By using a Singh-ray Soft-Focus Filter I got the image I wanted.

*Canon EOS 5D, EF 70-200mm lens, ISO 320, 1/25 sec at f16,
Singh-ray Soft focus filter*

57

Make time for play

If you don't make time for play and experimenting with your photography, you'll surely get stuck in a rut. The enjoyment of it all is what got you into photography in the first place, so remember those early days of wonder and make time to rekindle your love of photography.



Canon EOS 5D, EF 24-70mm lens, ISO 100, 1/5 sec at f22, CPL

When I'm doing multiple exposures, blurs, pans, zooms, and other techniques with my garden photography, I'm always loosening up and having fun; and I probably have a smile on my face. Some days you need to get back to the basics, but other days you might need to let go and have fun. With the image "Jazz" I was doing just that; from moving the camera from outstretched arms to pulling it into my mid-section, and turning a bit to the left. I had never done that before, so it was an experiment and I liked the results.

58

Take breaks

Yes, I can and will photograph garden subjects all day given the chance, but I also find my creativity wanes if I don't take a few breaks and get something to eat or drink during the day. Take a break to recharge your mind, and most of all your sore back.



Canon EOS 5D, EF 24-70mm lens, ISO 100, 1/100 sec at f5.6

It was a partly cloudy day when I took this image, and I waited until the sun rode the edge of a cloud before taking the shot. By doing this I was able to lower the contrast and increase the detail and saturation with the photo. I placed one sharp iris into a patch of green, and let the rest blur out as if it were a watercolor. I loved the look of the woman's hat in the background and was thankful she was looking my way just as the sun darted behind the cloud cover.

59

Create photo art

There are countless varieties of software to create art with your photographs; this image was created just using Photoshop and Nik Software's Silver Efex Pro plugin. Given all the plugins today for backgrounds, painterly images, and more, it's getting easier and easier to go artful and build something stellar out of a competent image.



Canon EOS 5D, EF 24-70mm lens, ISO 400, 1.8 sec at f22, CPL

I took a classic shot from "under that tree" in the Portland Japanese Garden on a foggy fall day. The original image has done quite well for me, but I wanted an even moodier vision of the same photo. Using Nik Silver Efex Pro plugin I came up with this high-contrast and heavy-vignette look that I like.

60

Shoot gardens and flowers and process for black and white



I began photographing gardens with infra-red film and had a blast turning all the greens into whitish glows. Photographing gardens and flowers in black and white isn't done enough in my opinion, so look for great examples to photograph gardens and flowers sans color. Without color you'll need to concentrate more on composition, form, tones, and texture within your image.

*Canon EOS 5D,
EF 100mm lens,
ISO 200, 1/100 sec
at f5.6*

I knew I would process these calla lilies as a black-and-white image as soon as I began photographing them. I liked the light, contrast, and tones to the image, so I was thinking black and white the whole way. With Nik Software's Silver Efex Pro I added the grain and borderline to complete the look I wanted.

61

Use a zoom lens to compress a scene

A zoom lens is essential for garden photography for picking out pieces of a distant landscape, or for macro work which I often use in conjunction with extension tubes or close-up filters. For landscape photography I use a zoom to pick out the garden details or to create a layering effect. On foggy days, I often look for how trees stack up with one another and how they lose detail as they recede into the mist; the layering on these days works exceptionally well.



Canon EOS 5D, EF 70-200mm lens, ISO 200, 1-15 sec at f16

When I spotted this field of poppies growing in the Willamette Valley of Oregon, I wanted to recreate the feeling I had of seeing such a multitude of flowers in one place. To do this, I chose a zoom lens and crouched down a bit lower to overlap all the poppies. By using a zoom and compressing the scene I was able to capture the feeling I had of seeing so many poppies in one place.

62

Zoom in while shooting

This is a technique that I find works best with fall foliage. Take your zoom lens and zoom as you press the shutter. You can shoot at any speed (some people prefer a slower shutter speed to a faster one), so practice, play, and shoot away. And when you zoom while shooting, remember to follow through with the zoom in or zoom out to avoid your sensor from picking up those hesitant moves in the image.



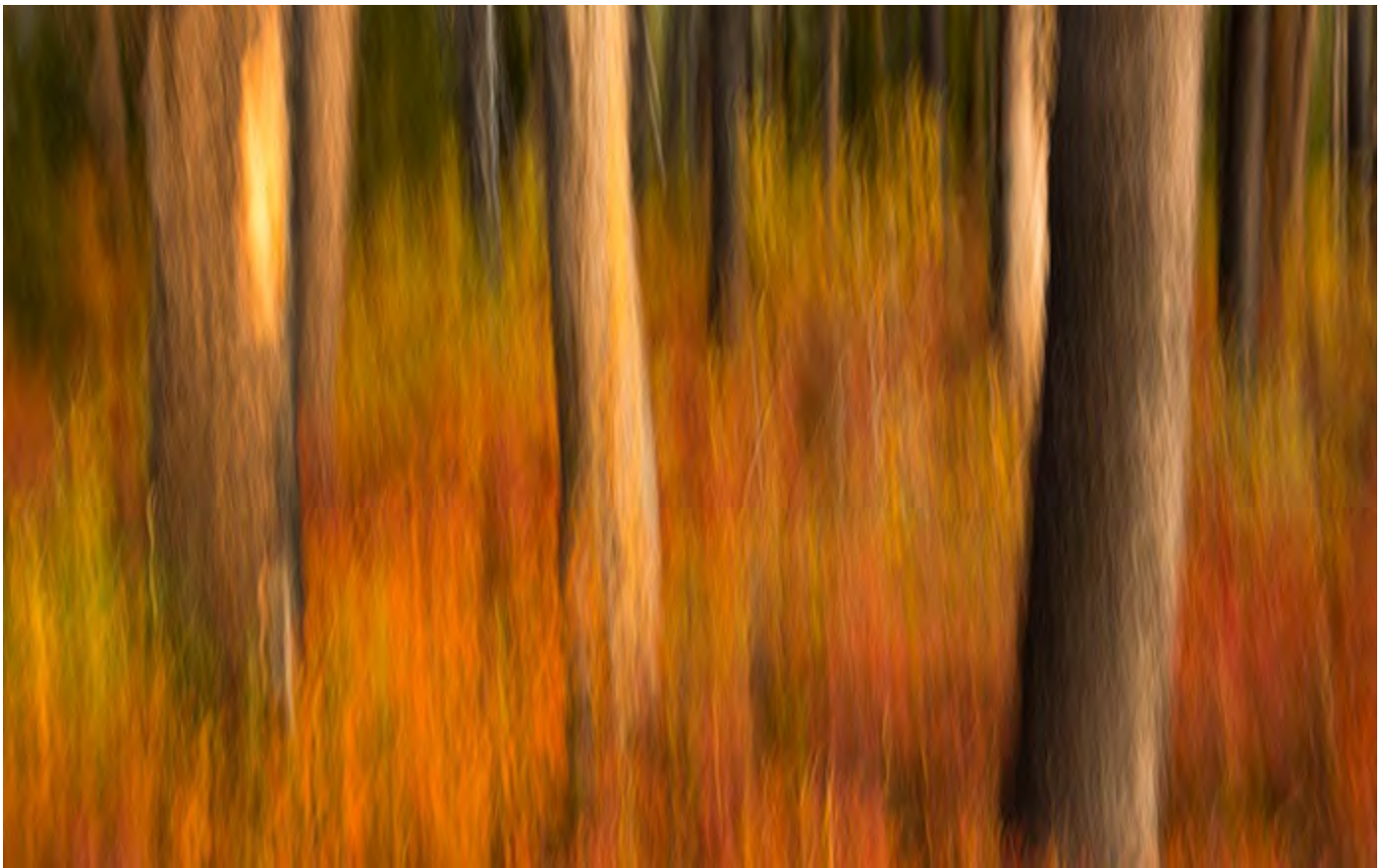
Canon EOS 5D, EF 70-200mm lens, ISO 100, .4 sec at f22, CPL

I was in Glacier National Park teaching a workshop when I took this image. I use it as a demonstration for what can be done with fall color. The sun was heading for a distant ridge, but there was still enough high contrast to the scene for a zoom or pan shot to work. For me, something around a half-second works well as I zoom in or out. To reach that half-second I needed to put on my polarizer set my ISO at 100 to slow things down, and set my aperture at f22—that got me close enough.

63

Pan while shooting

Like infra-red photography, panning your camera while shooting works best in higher-contrast situations. Find a group of trees that look interesting and pan up and down while you press the shutter. Like zooming while shooting, everyone works at different speeds, so it really doesn't matter what the shutter speed is for this technique. Just practice and see where your sweet spot lies. Remember that follow-through is important while panning, so even if you've taken the shot be sure to follow through. I find that the hesitation and anticipation of stopping leads to poor flow in your image, so follow through for a cleaner shot.



Canon EOS 5Diii, EF 24-70mm lens, ISO 100, .3 sec at f16, CPL

I photographed this forest pan as the light picked up along the Sawtooth Range in Idaho. Given the soft light on the trees and the beautiful fall color on the ground floor, I thought this was the perfect opportunity to do a forest pan. I gave a few practice swings before shooting, and then felt comfortable enough to shoot away. Like a golf or baseball swing, follow through is important with this technique. If you don't follow through you'll notice jagged lines in the image caused by anticipating the shutter click.

64

Photograph sharp and soft, and near and far on one frame

This is another multiple exposure technique that I use in garden or flower photography with interesting effects: taking three different images on a frame at around f4 or f5.6. Take the first image of the foreground, the second of the background, and for the third totally defocus and blur to give the image a nice wash of color. Your result will be creative, fun, and (with luck) beautiful.



Canon EOS 1V, EF 24-70mm lens, Fuji Velvia ISO 50, 3 exposures at f4/1.3 stops underexposed. 1 shot for foreground, 1 shot for mid-ground, 1 shot blurred and out of focus. CPL

The light was picking up in these Willamette Valley tulip fields, so I started to play with something different. With these three images on one frame in my old film camera, things turned out better than I had expected.

65

Photograph wildflowers

I love to spend a morning rolling around in a meadow photographing wildflowers. Where I live, I often go out in the morning with a cup of coffee in one hand and my camera in the other to photograph wildflowers growing on my property. The vast variety and beauty of wildflowers can be staggering in the U.S., so take a hike and find some of those gems growing wild.



*Canon EOS 5Diii, EF 70-200mm lens, ISO 400, 1/640 sec at f5.6,
Kenko Pro 1.4x teleconverter, Canon 500D close-up filter, hand held.*

For this image of filaree growing in the Columbia River Gorge of Washington, I had to get low to the ground and hand-hold my camera. I attached a Kenko Pro teleconverter and used it in conjunction with my Canon 500D: this is my favorite combination when I photograph any flower, but especially wildflowers. It was another windy day along the river, so I used a higher ISO and a shallow depth-of-field to beat the wind and create a softer look to these wildflowers.



Canon EOS 5Diii, EF 100mm lens, ISO 100, 1/60 sec at f5.6

Try something different and photograph plants in the garden in snow. Maybe it's fall or maybe it's early spring and the crocus are poking through a dusting from a late-season snowstorm. Grab your camera and catch these fleeting opportunities when you can.

After a heavy fall snowstorm, I drove to the Hood River Valley of Oregon to try and catch some of the fruit on the vine in the snow. Early season snow doesn't happen too much in Oregon, so I took a number of pear shots in snow. This was a great way to enjoy the outdoors, and since these images are a novelty they'll probably sell well too.

67

Use your smartphone

Phone photography has taken off in the past few years, so why ignore it when in the garden. There are apps to identify plants, apps for multiple exposures, apps to create paintings from your smartphone images—just to name a few. The camera and video for your phone has made vast improvements in the past few years and will only get better, so use your phone for photographing the garden.



Smart Phone App Auto Painter 3

I took an image I'd shot at the Meerkerk Garden on Bainbridge Island in Washington and popped it into my smartphone app "Auto Painter 3," using one of the painterly settings to create this image. There are so many apps out there for photography, but this one works particularly well for garden and flower photography.

68

Go with the flow

If it's a windy day and you have no hope of getting anything sharp with your camera, then go with the flow. Sometimes an image of flowers or leaves in a breeze can capture the energy of the wind and the beauty of the colors. Place your camera on a tripod and photograph the motion of the garden over time, and enjoy the accidental results you catch. Let go, and go with the flow.



Canon EOS 5D, EF 24-70mm lens, ISO 100, 2.5 sec at f22, CPL

Not a garden, but an old schoolhouse on the Columbia Plateau in Oregon. The wind was blowing so hard on this plateau that I knew it wasn't possible to keep the wheat still—and I really didn't want to. By using a low ISO and shooting at f22 (and using a polarizer) I kept the aperture open as long as possible to show the movement of grass in juxtaposition to the still schoolhouse.

Chapter 3

Close-up Garden Photography



69

When you feel you're close enough, get even closer to your subject

Too often backgrounds intrude upon a good flower image, so if you can't find a good background then don't have one. Get close enough to the flower to really make it pop, and concentrate instead on the stamens and radial lines of the bloom.



*Canon EOS 1V, EF 70-200mm lens, Kenko Pro 1.4x teleconverter,
Fuji Velvia ISO 50, 1 sec at f22*

This water lily floated off a path in a hotel garden on the Cook Islands, but the blackish water didn't help the beauty of the flower at all so I added a Kenko Pro 1.4x teleconverter to my 70-200mm zoom lens and got closer. Now the shot is about the radial lines and color of the flower and the water hardly intrudes.

70

Photograph flowers and plants at f2.8 or f4 with a shallow depth-of-field

I often create macro images at f2.8 or f4 for that shallow depth-of-field look. I like the painterly artistic feel these shots have, and I often isolate an edge or a line of a flower when photographing in close-up mode with a shallow depth-of-field.



Canon EOS 5Diii, EF 100mm lens, ISO 640, 1/500 sec at f2.8, hand held

This day I photographed on my belly, getting low and underneath the flowers as the rain soaked just about everything I wore. (Interestingly, while lying beside the road, two people stopped to see if I was alright and a police car stopped to check on my status.) Although I usually use a tripod, these flowers were so low to the ground I needed to hand-hold my camera. I cranked up my ISO and had at it, and this was the image I liked best.

71

Photograph flowers and plants at f22 or f32 for a deeper depth-of-field



Canon EOS 5D, EF 100mm lens, ISO 100, 1 sec at f22

If the flower or plant has great depth and wonderful layers of form to it, you may choose to highlight this by shooting it at f22 or f32 to increase the depth-of-field. I often use these f-stops when trying to document a plant for my stock photography portfolio.

The light was beautiful when I passed by this agave on the Pacific Crest Trail in the Anza Borrego Desert of California. I had my tripod leaning over the plant and made sure I was parallel to my subject before shooting. I focused on the tips of the agave, and let the rest of the sharpness fall where it may as the eye descends into the shadow of the succulent.

72

If your flower is vertical, give the camera a slight tilt to create a more dynamic image



By tilting your camera at a 10-15-degree angle, you can create a much more dynamic image. Flowers standing straight up and down can be a bit boring, so a slight tilt will be more interesting.

This skunk cabbage in the Olympic National Park in Washington was standing straight up in the bog when I photographed it, but it looked a bit boring photographed that way. By tilting my camera about 15 degrees to the left it created a much more dynamic wildflower image.

Canon EOS 5D, EF 70-200mm lens, ISO 100, 8 sec at f32, Canon 500D close-up filter, CPL

73

Look for complementary colors

Colors that complement each other are those on the opposite ends of the color spectrum. Opposites attract, and these colors tend to highlight each other and go well together.



Canon EOS 5D, EF 70-200mm lens, ISO 320, 1/50 sec at f11, Canon 500D close-up filter

In late spring/early summer in my hometown of Mosier, Oregon the purple vetch and blue bachelor buttons mix with the orange California poppies. For this image I wanted to mix the two complementary colors for a more dynamic image. I used my Canon 500D in conjunction with my zoom lens for a soft background and foreground, and kept my focus on the front of the poppy petal to keep it sharp and to give the eye something to hang on to.

74

Look for harmonious colors



Colors near each other on the color spectrum are harmonious. Pay attention to each color's tonality and how those tones play off of each other in the composition.

At our local farmer's market the dahlias were looking particularly lush that week, so I purchased a few bundles to photograph. Setting them on a table in the shade I began by stacking the flower bundles on their sides to catch the floral patterns. Using a few flowers partially open and some closed flowers helped tell the story about the life cycle of the flowers too. I focused on the upper tips at f22 for sharpness throughout.

Canon EOS 1V, EF 100mm lens, Fuji Velvia ISO 50, 1 sec at f22

75

Look for uniformity of color



When there is uniformity of color, you can depend more on shape, pattern, and form to create interest in an image. This usually adds rhythm and depth to an otherwise dull color palette.

When I discovered these almost-fluorescent ferns on Whidbey Island I definitely wanted to photograph them. Since there is a uniformity of color here, the best way to represent the form of these plants was to use a shallower depth-of-field to capture the depth of the image without making it too busy.

Canon EOS 5D, EF 70-200mm lens, ISO 320, 1/8 sec at f5.6, CPL

76

Look for patterns of shape

Patterns of shape help create rhythm in your image and give the composition form. These examples are everywhere in a garden, from variegated leaves to leaf and flower shapes.



Canon EOS 5Diii, EF 70-200mm lens, ISO 100, 30 sec. at f32, CPL, Canon 500D close-up filter

When I spotted these velvet foot mushrooms, I just had to photograph them. I got close with my zoom lens, but needed my Canon 500D close-up filter to help make the shapes dominant in the frame as I didn't want any space surrounding these mushrooms. Since my close-up filter creates a shallower depth-of-field, I shot this image at f32 to get them all tack-sharp. Making sure my lens was parallel to my subject also helped as I'm always aware of my focal plane when photographing in macro mode.

77

Look for patterns of color

Shapes definitely make patterns but so do colors, and they often go hand-in-hand. Any repetition you can give to your image will create a photo that is more pleasing to the eye.



Canon EOS 5D, EF 70-200mm lens, ISO 100, .6 sec at f32, CPL, Kenko Pro 1.4x teleconverter

I focused into this grouping of tulips because of the complementary colors of red and green, but I also wanted to include enough tulip flowers to create a pattern. Using a Kenko Pro 1.4x teleconverter helped me reach out and grab the right number of flowers to create a pattern.

78

Photograph the best blooms in the garden

It sounds obvious, but when photographing flowers look for the best blooms. Find what's at peak and concentrate on those flowers to bring out the spark and beauty of a great garden landscape.



Canon EOS 5Diii, EF 100mm lens, ISO 100, 1/4 sec at f16

Pear blossoms don't look much better than this, but I had to search awhile for them as I looked around the trees during blossom season. I have a variety of fruit trees on my property, and every year I go out with my camera and macro lens to photograph all of them. And every year I try to make improvements over last year's shots. Some years the blossoms are better than the others, but here I found the best blossoms on the best tree in the best year—and it makes a difference. (I was photographing these blooms for a possible cover shot of a magazine I often work with, and this image did indeed end up on their cover.)

79

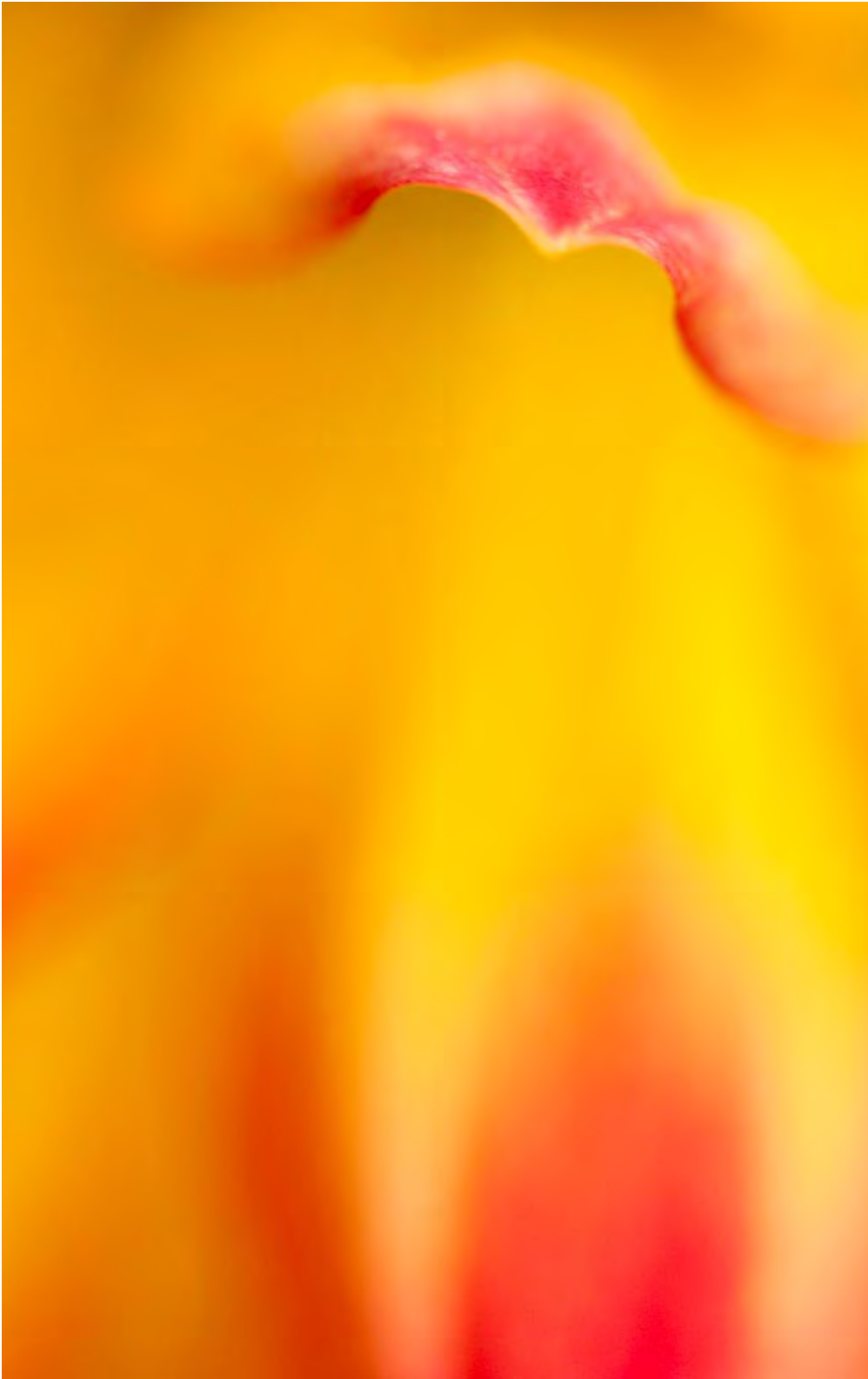
Photograph plants past their prime

Dead and dying flowers can have a lot of interest to them, whether it be their soft earth tones or their texture. They can make great subjects.



Canon EOS 5D, EF 100mm lens, ISO 400, 1/50 sec at f2.8

I thought this flower had a lot of character and still kept its beauty even though it was past its prime, so I spent some time photographing it while always being aware of the flower's background.



Canon EOS 5D, EF 100mm lens, ISO 100, 1/6 sec at f5.6,
48mm Kenko extension tubes.

Without losing any image quality, extension tubes allow you to get closer to your subject by not looking through yet another piece of glass. However, the trade-off is that you lose light. As you get closer to your subject, you're able to focus on a piece of a flower rather than the whole flower, and a bit is often much more interesting than the whole.

As I moved closer to this dahlia by using extension tubes the macro lens opened up a whole new world of photographic possibilities for me. I concentrated on the tip of the dahlia since it reminded me of a bird in flight, and I let the rest fall out of focus with a look of rising flames.

Use a close-up filter or diopter



***Canon EOS 5D, EF 70-200mm lens, ISO 320, 1/125 sec at f6.3,
1.4x Kenko Pro teleconverter, Canon 500D close-up filter***

Close-up filters are similar to extension tubes but they screw on to your lens just like a filter. The trade-off here is that you lose quality, but you don't lose stops of light like an extension tube. I find these helpful with macro-flower images or when photographing skittish small animals or insects in the garden. Try using a close-up filter in conjunction with your zoom lens, which allows you to get closer to your subject and make it larger. (I also love the soft backgrounds close-up filters create with a shallower depth-of-field.) By being a bit further away from the subject (a fragile flower) with a zoom rather than a macro lens, your breath or body heat won't make a still flower begin to move by a man-made created breeze.

This image was taken on a median of two roads with cars and buses on both sides causing a lot of wind for these poppies. I didn't want to lose too many stops of light with extension tubes, so I popped on my Canon 500D close-up filter. I use this filter or diopter a lot, and love the soft background it creates. The yellow dandelions work well as a background addition.

82

Use a true macro lens, extension tubes, and close-up filters (diopters) for macro photography

There is a whole new world out there when you look through a true macro lens. Macro photography captures your subject at a one-to-one ratio or closer. When you add extension tubes and close-up filters (diopters) to your lens, you can experience a garden from a bug's-eye view.



***Canon EOS 5D, EF 100mm lens, ISO 400, 1/1250 sec at f4,
Kenko 12mm & 36mm extension tubes, Canon 500D close-up filter***

On hot summer days on my property in the Columbia River Gorge I like to photograph yellow salsify seedpods against the setting sun. A bit of water from a spray bottle adds some shape to the image, and a shallow depth-of-field keeps things from getting too busy. Attaching a diopter or close-up filter and using extension tubes makes the small things come alive and opens up a whole new world of photography.

83

Shoot three consecutive shots if there is a slight breeze

Here's a trick I've been using for some time in close-up flower photography: If there is a slight breeze or if it's windy take three consecutive shots, and one of those shots will have stopped the motion.



Canon EOS 5Diii, EF 70-200mm lens, ISO 320, 1/500 sec at f5.6, Canon 500D close-up filter

It was a slightly windy day in Texas when I took this image in a field of flowers. Wanting to show the unorganized "wild" look to these wildflowers, I got low with my camera to shoot. One of the flowers always seemed to be moving in the breeze, so I shot 3 in a row "bang, bang, bang" and one came out the way I wanted. This technique never fails me when the wind is blowing.

84

Use the stacking technique with Helicon Focus

Helicon Focus is one of the best stacking software out there. You can photograph a stationary flower at f2.8 while continuing to change your depth-of-field. With these numerous "slices" taken of the flower, you can now stack them using the software. Your flower will be tack-sharp while keeping the background soft.



I photographed this red currant flower in my yard on a windless day and took nine shots, slowly focusing at f2.8 across the flower until I covered most of it with a sharpened focus. I processed the TIFFs and then transferred them into my Helicon Focus stacking program. The program took only the sharp portions of each image and stacked them into one sharp image, while keeping the background soft. A bit of clean-up with a couple of ghosting issues yielded this image.

**Canon EOS 5Diii, EF
100mm lens, ISO 400,
1/10 sec at f2.8**



A scrim can work to help diffuse harsh light when photographing small flowers, and it also comes equipped with gold and silver reflectors which help bounce light into needed areas of shadow. I find this tool a necessity when photographing smaller compositions and as a way to help light people in the garden.

When I photographed this Pasque Flower in Victoria, Canada there was some brighter glancing light that seemed distracting, so I unfolded my scrim to diffuse the brighter light in preference for the softer even light.

Canon EOS 5D, EF 70-200mm lens, ISO 2500, 1/80 sec at f4

86

Photograph refractive light through water droplets



Canon EOS 5D, EF 100mm lens, ISO 400, 1/100 sec at f4

By using a macro lens, you can get close enough to the water droplets to photograph the refractive light. The light might refract color or miniature flowers, which will lead to a delicate and beautiful image.

One of my winter rituals is to head out to the meadows of the Columbia River Gorge along the Oregon and Washington borders and photograph the first grass widows. The flowers start popping up in late January and peak around mid-March. For this image I caught the refraction of the flower through a dew drop on the green blade of a grass widow.

87

Photograph flowers through glass



Another way to photograph refractive light is to add water to a piece of glass and photograph the water beads. First spray some Rain-X on the glass and give it a quick wipe. Next, spray some water onto the glass until it beads up in small droplets. Balance the glass on a couple of chair edges or table edges and place a flower below the glass. Focus your lens from above on the water beads and start shooting. If you're doing this indoors remember to adjust your white balance to the tungsten setting or a cooler kelvin temperature.

Canon EOS 5D, EF 100mm lens, ISO 200, 30 sec at f22

For the image "Sunny Day" I purchased a bloom at the local flower shop and followed the directions listed here. The only light I used for this image was side lighting from a nearby window.

88

When photographing flowers, use the “shoot-through” or “cram” technique

I usually use a zoom for this technique, and use it when I want to eliminate distracting elements or when I want a wash of color throughout my image. I place my zoom against a number of blossoms while focusing on a background flower. The front images are blurred and help obscure a number of distractions like twigs or branches. They also create a more ‘painterly’ feel to the photograph.



Canon EOS 5D, EF 70-200mm lens, ISO 200, 1/160 sec at f4, Kenko Pro 1.4x teleconverter

I loved the color of these tulips on top of a rock wall in my neighborhood, but couldn't photograph them without including distracting parts of a nearby house. My solution was to lay my lens right in front of a bundle of red and orange flowers and then "shoot through" them. This gave a nice wash of color across the stems, and also eliminated the distracting staircase and window of the house.

89

Use a Lensbaby® for fun and creativity

Part of the reason to use a Lensbaby® is for play, and that's probably why you got into photography in the first place. As you play with this selective focus lens, relax and let your mind wander—that's when you start to get more creative. Let the tripod go, and just shoot away, readjusting the focal point as you go, and always recomposing. There is a certain zen-like ability to see when photographing, and a Lensbaby can get you to that point a bit quicker.



Canon EOS 5D, Lensbaby® 3G, ISO 250, 1/80 sec at f4, Lensbaby® macro kit

For the image "Awash in Color" I screwed on a close-up filter to my Lensbaby and got on my belly to start shooting. When I hand-hold my camera I shoot away for as long as I can stand it. For this image I needed something for the eye to hold on to, so I made sure the right side stamens stayed in focus. For the rest of the image I just wanted a wash of color with an impressionistic feel. I think I got what I was after on this day in the Butchart Gardens.

90

Use a Lensbaby® to isolate the best blooms with selective focus



*Canon EOS 5D, Lensbaby® 3G, ISO 100, 1/10 sec at f5.6,
Lensbaby® macro kit*

When the garden or wildflower blooms aren't so pristine, try choosing the best one to photograph and then blur out the rest with a Lensbaby® selective focus lens. By choosing the best bloom and blurring the rest, you give the illusion that all these flowers are pristine.

This grouping of Oregon Sunshine flowers were well past their prime, so I looked for the best flower in the group to focus and blurred out the rest. You see one flower that looks pretty good, and you assume the blurred ones are nice too (even though they aren't). By blurring the burned-out flowers I created an illusion of perfection.

Look for “S” curves in macro/micro photography



Canon EOS 5D, EF 100mm lens, ISO 200, 1/13 sec at f2.8

“S” curves aren’t just good for garden landscape images; try using them when you’re working with macro/micro compositions too.

When I photographed this iris, I chose f2.8 for a shallow depth-of-field and then found this delicate “S” curve. I made sure my camera’s focal plane was parallel to my subject and focused on the edge, letting the rest of the flower go soft.

Pay attention to your focal plane when shooting close-ups



You can shoot macro photography with a shallow depth-of-field and get the entire plant in focus, but you must pay attention to the focal plane. Being parallel with your subject is quite important since macro lenses also have quite shallow depth-of-fields. Even at f16 or f22, if I'm photographing a pattern of plants on the ground I'm aware of my focal plane. I try to stay parallel to my subject if I want it all to be in focus. Of course, you can adjust your focal plane for sections of the plant to be in focus and other sections to be out of focus for a more creative effect.

*Canon EOS 5Diii, EF 100mm
lens, ISO 200,
30 sec at f32, CPL*

When photographing this redwood forest groundcover along a trail in Redwood National Park, California I needed to be aware of my focal plane even at f32. After composing the shot, I made sure I was parallel to plants before photographing. I focused on the upper leaves and flowers for the shot.

93

Photograph dew and water droplets on plants and flowers

Morning dew and water droplets can add interest to a photograph and help tell a story about your subject. The water also catches light for a prettier and more interesting image.



Canon EOS 5Diii, EF 100mm lens, ISO 400, .6 sec at f22

I loved the clean and vibrant look to these flowers, and I felt the water droplets added to the pattern of plants and helped highlight them in a new way.

94

Remove debris

Sometime newly risen plants and mushrooms can be filled with distracting debris, so you might need to conduct a bit of grooming before the photography begins. If there are small sticks, distracting or dead grasses, clumps of dirt, or anything else that takes away from the subject of your photograph, do a bit of clean-up work before you begin.



Canon EOS 5D, EF 100mm lens, ISO 200, 4 sec at f22, CPL

I did some cleanup of debris before taking this image of chanterelles. When I first found them they were covered in needles and dirt. I let a few needles remain for the purposes of realism, but I took enough off to create a clean image.

95

Photograph colorful or interesting leaves

Canon EOS 5Diii, EF 100mm lens, ISO 100, 8 sec at f16, CPL

Anytime is a good time to photograph leaves in the garden, but fall and spring are my favorite times to isolate a leaf or two. Spring greens can be varied and light, and the warmer colors of fall are always spectacular. During the summer months look for variegated plant leaves, and during the winter look for patterns on evergreens.

This fall leaf had almost as many colors in it as a rainbow, and it made a great subject to photograph –with water droplets just adding to the image. I made sure I was parallel to the focal plane of the leaf before photographing, and I used a polarizer to cut down on leaf glare.

96

Photograph garden insects

Photographing garden insects can be challenging. You'll likely have better luck if you look for them in the morning while they're still sluggish and less apt to flitter about. I often hand-hold my camera when photographing insects, so I make sure to turn up the ISO and also turn on the image-stabilization on my lens. I also photograph insects with my zoom lens in conjunction with my close-up filter. This allows me to keep my distance (thus not making them skittish) while also having my small subject remain large. I pay attention to my background, because a clean background will highlight the subject much more than a confusing background. Make sure that when you focus on an insect you keep the subject's eyes sharp.



**Canon EOS 5D, EF 70-200 mm lens, ISO 400, 1/250 sec at f4,
Kenko Pro 1.4x, Canon 500D close-up filter**

This image was taken at the Victoria Butterfly Garden, and if you arrive early enough it's like shooting fish in a barrel. Since I was indoors, I went for a cooler white balance and I used my Canon 500D in conjunction with my 1.4x teleconverter to keep my distance while also keeping my subject large. I used a higher ISO and an f4 aperture here, as the butterfly was flitting about and I needed speed. I made sure the focus on the front eye was sharp and I let the rest fall into softness.

97

Photograph garden mushrooms

Mushrooms are the flowers of the fall and can be quite elegant if photographed well. Look for them in the garden and concentrate your focal point on the outer rims. Be aware of your focal plane when shooting mushrooms. With mushroom photography be aware of shiny spots or black soil patches in the background that can be distracting. Batches of fall leaves can fill these holes and add to the color of the image. Flip those yard mushrooms over too, because sometimes mushrooms look better from below than above.



Canon EOS 5D, EF 100mm lens, ISO 200, 30 sec at f22

I noticed these mushrooms growing at the base of a stone wall at the Portland Japanese Garden. I framed them tight to avoid distracting elements outside the frame. The area was pretty dark, but there was a soft light that I liked and a 30-second exposure picked up that light nicely.



Canon EOS 5D, EF 70-200mm lens, ISO 100, 1/13 sec at f7.1, CPL

I carry a spray bottle with me in the dry times of the year to freshen up the plants a bit. The extra water helps with saturation, rim lighting, and gives a plant a fresher sparkle over a dry dusty plant.

These lupine were growing wild on a neighbor's property, and I liked this cluster with the warm background light. After I framed the scene I covered my lens and sprayed a healthy amount of water on the plants to freshen them up. Even though this image was taken in the heat at sunset, the water droplets lend a cooler sunrise feel to the photo. The droplets also add a sparkle to the blooms and nice rim lighting in places.



Canon EOS 5D, EF 100mm lens, ISO 200, 1.6 sec at f32

There are a wide variety of succulents for the garden setting, but they all have such beautiful form and texture they're almost too hard to pass up with the camera. Given their beautiful texture, I almost always stop down and photograph these plants at f22 or even f32 to capture all the details.

I found this specimen growing out of a cliff along the California coastline in Redwood National Park. I loved the texture of the plant and the color of its flowers. I chose to increase the ISO due to the shoreline breeze and photographed it at f32 to capture the plant's wonderful detail. This succulent was in the shade when I photographed it, but the bright reflective bounce-light off of the beach provided a wonderful soft glow.



Canon EOS 5Diii, EF 100mm lens, ISO 100, 20 sec at f22

Tree bark is a great subject for abstract photography and for photographing patterns and textures. I've photographed the bark of birch, aspen, Pacific madrona, just to name a few, and I found them to be fun, interesting, and challenging subjects.

This aspen had a few ax marks across the bark where the tree was making a transition from clean to rough. I love the markings and texture, and the blue hue it was giving off played against the red of the wood. I photographed this tree at f22 to make sure I would keep the curvature of the tree sharp from near to far.

About the Author



I have been a photographer all my life, but in 2005 I moved to full-time professional photography. I started by building my image inventory—taking thousands of photos throughout the Pacific Northwest. I have been an avid long-distance hiker for many years which has given me an intimate knowledge of the areas of natural beauty of the Pacific Northwest. I used this knowledge to shoot this region in a personal way that helped me develop a style of my own.

I then branched out to more extensive domestic and then international travel and shooting, the results giving me an expanded image bank of a wide variety of photos from around the world—still with the emphasis on nature and landscapes. I sell my images to many magazines, online venues, and

companies using them for print materials. I also sell art prints to both individuals and businesses. My images have appeared in a number of fine art gallery shows as well.

In 2005, I purchased the photography workshop company *Best of the Northwest* and have been teaching photo workshops ever since. My workshops include shooting time as a group, presentations on everything from the creative process to Photoshop, and one-on-one consultations with workshop participants. Workshops range from 1-8 days with an average of 15 students, and I currently teach 15-18 workshops a year. I also conduct workshops through the Pacific Northwest Art School, the Portland Japanese Garden, the Lan Su Chinese Garden, the Cascade Center of Photography, and Destination Earth. My workshop sponsors include Lensbaby® and f-Stop gear. I have given talks to groups at photography conferences, to photography clubs, hiking clubs, social clubs, and at venues such as the U.S. Botanic Garden, the Denver Botanical Gardens, REI, Portland State

University, and Intel Corporation. In 2010 I formed Photo Cascadia with five other Pacific Northwest photographers.

Along the way, I started to spend a great deal of time shooting gardens. I became particularly fond of photographing the Portland Japanese Garden, and in 2007 I became their main contributing photographer—shooting for them throughout the year on an annual contract. My Japanese garden images are used for their website, kiosks, books, cards, calendars, advertisements, and billboards at the Oregon Convention Center and Portland International Airport. My garden images have appeared in a number of gardening, travel, and lifestyle magazines.

Now as I photograph throughout the US and around the world, I am continually awed by the broad spectrum of nature's offerings—from a delicate heliconia flower on the exotic island of Rorotonga to the sweeping Icelandic landscape. My particular fondness for the Pacific Northwest is reflected in my local outdoor shots. My goal is to capture the wonders I see in nature for the enjoyment of all those with an eye for the extraordinary.

My book "Quiet Beauty: Japanese Gardens of North America" was released in April 2013 on Tuttle Publishing, and I am currently working on "Gardens of Vision" for a 2016 release on Tuttle Publishing. "Quiet Beauty" won gold at the Independent Book Publishers Awards for Best Book in the "Home and Garden" category in 2014. I've been included in the International Garden Photographer of the Year winner's circle from 2011-2015. My images have hung at the U.S. Botanic Garden in Washington D.C., the National Institutes of Health in Bethesda, Maryland, the Royal Botanic Garden in England, and the Burke Museum of Natural History in Seattle, Washington.

