

January 2023 Newsletter

www.alamancephoto.com

www.facebook.com/alamancephotoclub



Photo by Audra Potter

APC ACTIVITIES

Next Meeting

Jan. 16, 2023 7:00pm First Baptist Church

Programs

Jan. 16, 2023 African Wildlife
by Sean Leahy

2023 PhotoShows

February - Monochrome
April - Photographer's Choice
June - Macro/'Up Close'
August - Action
October - People at Work

Field Trips

Q1 2023 Duke Chapel
Q2 2023 Burlington Arboretum/City
Park
Q3 2023 Duke Homestead
Q4 2023 TBD

Exhibits

TBA

HAPPY NEW YEAR!

President's Comments—January 2023

By Keith O'Leary

Happy New Year club members! Thank you for donating \$210.00 to First Baptist Church last month to show our gratitude for use of their facilities. I appreciate your generosity. Thanks also to Sam Lynch for serving as Vice President/Program Chair for

the last 3 years and please help me welcome John Reich as our new VP/Program Chair. I am excited to see what 2023 brings and thanks for your participation in making this a great club. Stay warm, stay well and Happy Shooting!

APC BOARD

President	Keith O'Leary	Publicity	Carole Barnard
Vice President	John Reich	Outings/Field Trips	Hugh Comfort
Secretary	George Siple	Membership	Ken Sellers
Treasurer	Dianne Sellers	Web Master	Christie O'Leary
PhotoShow Chair	Dick Schenck	Past President	Scott Duvall
Exhibit Chair	Angela Bostek	Editor	Ray Munns

January 16th Program – “African Wildlife”

By Sean Leahy



I grew up outside of Hartford, CT where I enjoyed photography and the outdoors. I would take photos at family gatherings and other events. I was always the person you would see with a camera. Then one day, I just stopped taking photos. I don't remember why I stopped.

I had a major life event, and I needed a new focus in my life. I was lost, I didn't know what to do. I was walking in a small New England town and decided to walk into the camera store. I went in and came out with a Canon Rebel and two Kit lenses.

I have always loved the outdoors, and I started taking photos of birds and I got bird fever. I set a goal to photograph all the birds in New England. I remember thinking how “hard can that be to take a photo of all the birds in New England, there are only 250 different birds that live in New England”. My experience is, it is very hard and even harder with a Kit lens.

I was very discouraged with the quality of the photos that I was shooting. After talking to other photographers I met along the way, I purchased a good 400mm lens and the *Sibley Bird Guide* book. My journey of bird photography has had a rebirth. I'm sure my path will continue and be convoluted as I move forward.

Today, I live in Burlington, NC and have traveled to over 25 states photographing birds. I traveled to South America in 2018 and have birded all 100 counties in North Carolina. I look forward to my next adventure and seeing some beautiful subjects to photograph as I branch out into more wildlife and landscapes.

Thanks,

Sean Leahy

SeanLeahyphotos.com

#seanleahyphotos

Sean@seanleahyphotos.com

Membership Corner

Ken Sellers

It's that time of year to renew your membership with Alamance Photography Club. This year our Club had sixty members who had the opportunity to participate in the Alamance Arts Photography Exhibit, "The Photographer's Eye," exhibits at Harrison's Restaurant and at the Burlington Artist League. During the year, we heard presentations from outstanding photographers, participated in fieldtrips to sharpen photographic skills and then to be judged/evaluated on those skills. At some of our meetings, some of our members even offered photography equipment to other members. But, most enjoyable and educational, is our monthly newsletter, which provides a wealth of information for you, the photography enthusiasts.

Our annual membership drive is officially underway from now through February 2023. The Alamance Photography Club is providing the following ways to assist you with dues, \$40 for Single, \$60 for Family, and \$15 for Full-Time Student:

- You can pay by credit card, check made to the Alamance Photography Club or by cash to the Club's Treasurer at a meeting or mail your check to Dianne Sellers, 3853 Wesley Court, Burlington, NC 27215.
- Online renewals: www.alamancephoto.com

As of December 22, almost 34% of current membership have renewed. *The renewal window will remain open until the end of February 2023.*

Ken Sellers
Membership Chair

Dianne Sellers
Treasurer



WEBMASTER NOTES

Thank you to all who participated in the Christmas party.

A shout out to: Angela Bostek and Carole Barnard who helped with the planning, Ray Munns who coordinated the use of the kitchen and helped set up as well as tear down, Ken and Dianne Sellers who greeted and helped tear down, and Keith O'Leary who helped set up and tear down.

Don't forget to visit the club's website in 2023 @ www.alamancephoto.com for:

- Membership renewal
- 2023 Events
- Member Galleries

Happy New Year,
Christie O'Leary

2023 Q1 Field Trip

The field trip this quarter has a new wrinkle – read on. The destination for this personal field trip is Duke Chapel (401 Chapel Dr, Durham, NC 27708) on the Duke University campus. The Chapel is open to the public daily from 10 AM to 8 PM. Visitors are welcome to take photos of the Chapel **for personal use only**, as long as it doesn't disturb others or interrupt an event. For more information, go to:

<https://chapel.duke.edu/visit-events/visit#tours>

Here is the wrinkle. The field trip dates are being extended *backwards* to include December 2022. December is usually left out of field trip opportunities because of the yearend Christmas Party. By including December in this trip, interior and exterior photos of the Chapel decorated for Christmas will be accessible for those who are interested in going in December. So, the time frame for this field trip will be December 1, 2022 – March 31, 2023.

Information on photo submission will be sent by email at a later date.

10 Tips for Gorgeous Winter Landscape Photography

By Christian Hoiberg

Winter landscape photography is a lot of fun – and it doesn't have to be hard, either, assuming you know the right techniques!

In this article, I share ten critical winter landscape tips so you can start capturing beautiful snowy landscapes like the pros. Specifically, I discuss:

- The best time of day for winter landscape photography. (This one might surprise you!)
- How to work with the weather
- The right winter camera settings
- How to enhance your winter landscape compositions
- Much, much more!

So if you're ready to take your winter images to the next level, then let's dive right in.

1. Pay attention to the weather

Weather can be the difference between an exhilarating photoshoot and a wasted handful of hours – so it's always important to check the weather in advance, follow the weather on your phone, and constantly observe the conditions while you're out shooting.

There's not one best type of weather for winter landscape photography, of course. Instead, you need to think about the type of images you want to create, then make plans that coincide with your weather requirements. For instance:

If you want to photograph a pristine snowfall at sunrise, make sure you choose a morning just after the snow has ended so that the blanket of white is completely undisturbed.

If you want to photograph mountains or trees in a snowstorm, make sure you head out in the thick of the snow (or just before the snow starts). It can help to observe the snowflakes before setting off to make sure they're reasonably large and are falling sufficiently fast; otherwise, you may struggle to capture the kind of moody winter landscape you're pursuing.

You should also watch the weather for safety reasons. If you plan to photograph a snowy mountain scene from a high altitude, you'll want to avoid driving in a blizzard. Instead, you should wait until the snow stops or head out in advance. That way, you can capture the photos you want, but you don't risk yourself or your gear in the process.

10 Tips for Gorgeous Winter Landscape Photography . . . Continued

2. Look for contrast to make those winter compositions stand out

After a few days of heavy snowfall, the landscape will be completely white: white trees, white lakes, white mountains, and (normally) a white sky. And when everything is white, it's quite challenging to find a compositional focal point as nothing really catches the eye.

So what do you do?

You look for contrast – either color contrast, where you find a splash of red, blue, or green against the white – or tonal contrast, such as a splash of darkness against the bright snow.

Here's an example of color contrast, where I found a red house against a white and gray background:



The red color is what makes this picture interesting. Without it, the scene would lack a focal point and the viewer's eyes would have no place to rest, which would make for a bad shot.

Happily, contrast is easy to find on snowy days because it'll catch your eye just the same as it'll catch a photo viewer's eye. So you can just go around with your camera, searching for an eye-catching element or two. Make sense?

By the way, I find red color contrast to be particularly pleasing in winter landscape scenes, but you can really search for any dominant color or tonal variation. Maybe there's an autumn leaf laying on top of a thin layer of snow, or maybe you can see a few skiers wearing red jackets, or maybe you're standing before a dark mountain surrounded by white. Just find a dominant color or tone in the otherwise white landscape, then use careful composition techniques to make it a standout focal point.

10 Tips for Gorgeous Winter Landscape Photography . . . Continued

3. Don't be afraid to use manual focus

As I mentioned in the previous tip, winter landscapes can be intensely white – and when you're dealing with monochromatic scenes, your camera will often struggle to lock focus.

When that happens, you have two options, both of which are generally effective. First, you can try using the focus-and-recompose technique. Simply set your camera to its AF-S (or One-Shot AF) setting, set the AF point to the center of the frame, half-press your shutter button to lock focus on an area of clear contrast in the scene, then recompose the shot. As long as you can find some part of your shot that's contrasty – a few rocks, a lone tree, or a river – you'll manage to capture a photo that's both in-focus and well-composed.

Occasionally, however, you'll run into a situation where your scene features very little contrast or the only clear contrast exists far behind your main subject. In the latter situations, I'd recommend switching your lens over to manual focus. Then set your camera to Live View, zoom in on your LCD, and carefully adjust the lens focus ring until you get a perfect result!

4. Use exposure compensation to ensure you capture plenty of detail

Camera meters are generally accurate, but they come with a significant problem.

They believe that everything should be a neutral gray tone. So while your camera's meter will do a great job of properly exposing for medium-toned subjects, a bright white subject – like snow – will cause major underexposure. (Why underexposure? Your camera sees the bright snow and tries to darken it down until it turns gray!)

Fortunately, cameras offer an easy solution: You can add in a stop or two of positive exposure compensation (or, if you're using Manual mode, you can deliberately overexpose). The perfect amount of exposure compensation depends on the scene, so I'd recommend testing out a few exposure adjustments to see what works. Just pay careful attention to the highlights; you don't want the snow to become a detail less white!

I sometimes lighten my winter landscapes even further because I like to create a bright-white effect. Such an artistic technique won't work for every image. But plenty of snow landscape photography can benefit from a bit of extra brightness, and you can always create multiple shots and see which you prefer!



10 Tips for Gorgeous Winter Landscape Photography . . . Continued

5. Choose a cold white balance to amplify the atmosphere

Technically, you can choose your white balance in camera or – if you're photographing in RAW – in post-processing. Either of those options works well, though sometimes it's nice to see a preview of the white balance in camera, so don't shy away from doing it that way (and remember: you can always change it later!).

Because winter is cold, a colder (bluer) white balance tends to look gorgeous. Note how the cool colors enhance this shot. The image feels frigid thanks to the color balance.

I don't recommend you go overboard. You don't need your shot to look like it came from a blue alien planet. Try pushing the white balance, experiment, and see what you get!



You're also free to tweak the white balance in post-processing, assuming you've shot in RAW. You can use the Temperature slider to move back and forth between warm and cool effects, and you can decide which look you prefer.

6. Seek out intimate winter landscape scenes

Many landscape photographers feel compelled to capture sweeping shots that include everything in the composition...

...but did you know that you can also create beautiful photos from intimate subjects? I'm talking about those small-scale scenes that are easy to pass by without noticing, such as:

- Berries in the snow
- Bubbles trapped in ice
- Plants poking out from under the snow
- Drooping tree branches

Finding intimate landscape shots can be difficult at first, but with a bit of practice, you'll start to notice all sorts of opportunities. And while you're free to experiment with different camera setups, I'd recommend starting with a 50mm lens or a short telephoto macro lens. Then just see what you can create!

10 Tips for Gorgeous Winter Landscape Photography . . . Continued

7. Photograph during the blue hour for ethereal winter landscapes

The blue hour refers to the time just before sunrise and just after sunset when the sun sits below the horizon and the world goes all beautiful and blue. During the blue hour, you still have enough light to shoot, yet nothing is lit directly. The light is soft and gorgeous.

And it works great for winter landscape photography. You see, the soft light caresses the snow, making for a fairytale effect. And if your photo includes streetlights or house lights, the composition can turn even more magical. Here's an example blue-hour image. See the magical effect? And do you see how the lights from the cabins look truly gorgeous against the cold background?



Spend a few days shooting during blue hour, and you may start to feel overwhelmed by the cold and darkness; in other words, you'll probably want to stay inside underneath a blanket.

But do yourself a favor. Force yourself to put on a coat, grab that camera, and get outside. The images will be worth it, even if the cold hits you like a blast in the face!

Note: You can still capture beautiful snowy landscape shots during sunrise and sunset or even around noon. But if I were able to choose just one time of day to head out with my camera during winter, it would be the blue hour. It really is that amazing.

8. Bring extra batteries and keep them warm

If you photograph in the bitter cold, then this tip is absolutely essential. Batteries drain much quicker in winter, and if you shoot mirrorless or you use Live View for most compositions, you'll soon find yourself without a drop of charge – unless you remember to bring plenty of extra batteries. Original-manufacturer batteries can be pretty pricey, so you might want to consider purchasing third-party batteries. (Some people love them and some people hate them; in the end, the choice is yours!)

10 Tips for Gorgeous Winter Landscape Photography . . . Continued

By the way, it's a good idea to keep spare batteries in an inner pocket of your jacket. That way, the batteries stay warm, which prevents the charge from draining fast. And once you've finished with a battery, put it back in your coat; you can sometimes "resurrect" dead batteries with a bit of coat warmth!

(Make sure, however, you don't put your camera in your coat. That may cause the lens elements to fog up, which is very problematic.)

9. Keep your gear clean and safe

Snow and cold may not seem quite as threatening to your gear as rain or sea spray, but they can still cause problems. Snow can collect on the front of your lens and cause blur; it can also melt inside your lens and – if left unchecked – lead to mold or rust. And cold can cause your equipment to fog up and/or turn frosty, neither of which are good for your images (or your gear!).



Therefore, I encourage you to take a handful of steps to actively prevent cold-weather problems:

- Don't change lenses in snowy conditions
- Keep a towel and rocket blower handy to wipe the snow off your camera and lens
- If the snow is heavy, consider using a rain cover
- Always leave your gear in a tightly sealed bag when moving from cold to warm environments (and give the gear a few hours to acclimate before taking it back out)
- Don't breathe on the front of your lens

10 Tips for Gorgeous Winter Landscape Photography . . . Continued

10. Don't forget to edit your winter landscape shots!



As a landscape photographer, you should do your best to get your photos right in the field. Yet you should also spend time editing your shots, if only briefly. A bit of editing can dramatically improve nearly every winter landscape you capture, so I encourage you to review each image, then test out a few presets or play around with a few sliders (at the very least).

In particular, I'd recommend tweaking the white balance (as I mentioned above, I favor a cooler color cast, but you can push the Temperature slider until you get an effect you like), adding a bit of contrast, subtly boosting the exposure, fine-tuning the tones (especially the highlights and shadows), and experimenting with different hues and saturations.

Your editing skills will develop over time, but even a few minor adjustments can go a long way!

Winter landscape photography: final words

Hopefully, you can now confidently photograph winter landscapes – so the next time you get a nice snowfall, head outside! Take some photos, appreciate the beauty, and have plenty of fun.

9 Tips for Gorgeous Macro Still Life Photography

By Rick Ohnsman

You may have done macro photography, and you may have photographed still-life subjects. But have you combined them for some macro still life photography fun?



Combine the love of gardening with the enjoyment of macro still life photography. These newly-planted African daisies proved beautiful subjects for shooting with my Canon EOS R6 mirrorless camera and a Tamron 90mm macro lens.

Macro photography speaks to the techniques and equipment we use to get close to a subject so that it appears as large as or larger than life-size.

Still life photography speaks more to the subject, those often inanimate objects that can be arranged, composed, lit, and controlled by the photographer. One thing the two genres have in common is the slow pace and purposeful approach the photographer can take. A distinct benefit to still life macro photography is that it will slow you down, make you look closer at your subject, and help you create an image that will show your subject in a way others might not have seen it. It will force you to become purposeful and creative, skills that will serve you well.

9 Tips for Gorgeous Macro Still Life Photography . . . Continued

Slow down, look closely, and explore a wondrous tiny world down among the leaves. These were done with a Canon 6D and a Tamron 90mm macro lens.

That is a short “why” for macro still life photography. Now, let’s offer you the what and how of the art.



What is macro photography?

In macro photography, the objective is to get close to your subject. But to truly be called “macro” photography, you will need to be able to render the subject at a 1:1 real-life-to-sensor size.

Visualize this: A full-frame sensor is 24 mm x 36 mm. A US quarter is 24.26 mm in diameter. So if you focus closely enough to fill the frame top to bottom with a quarter (not cropped), that would be a 1:1 ratio on a full-frame camera. If you can focus closer, that would be macro-plus. (And if you have the equipment, usually a microscope that can exceed 20:1, you’ve entered the world of micro photography, not something many do but interesting in its own right.) If you can’t achieve a 1:1 focusing distance, you might be able to make close-up photos, but they won’t be, in the purest sense, “macro” photos.

Does that matter? Not really. Close-up still life photography is fine, as well. We’re after the art more than the science. The idea here is to creatively examine, explore, and photograph the world in an introspective way.



If you can make this shot, uncropped so that a US quarter fills the frame top to bottom, then you are shooting at a 1:1 subject-to-sensor-size ratio. This is a “true macro” image on a full-frame sensor camera.

9 Tips for Gorgeous Macro Still Life Photography . . . Continued

1. Use the right equipment

To do macro photography, you need a macro lens, right? Well, that's one way to do it, but here are some other options:

- Diopter/close-up filters
- Extension tubes
- Bellows
- Reversed lenses
- Smartphone macro photography

I've not yet purchased a bellows, but otherwise have personally used all of the other methods and sometimes combine several together when making a macro photograph. Probably because it's the camera I always have with me, some of my favorite macro images have been done with my phone. Some may argue that a cellphone or smartphone isn't a "real" camera, but you can't argue with the images. Often, my cellphone makes a better macro photo than I could have taken with my "real" camera. I have annotated the images throughout this article with information about the equipment I used to make the shots.



Get closer... and closer. Here, I've used three extension tubes and my Tamron 90mm macro together to get ultra close to my subject.

9 Tips for Gorgeous Macro Still Life Photography . . . Continued



A reversing ring and an old film camera lens and you're ready to explore the world of macro on the cheap. Read all about this technique in my article, [Reverse Lens Macro – How to Make Macro Photos with “Backward Thinking”](#).



The best camera? The one you have with you! These were taken with my old LG G4 cellphone. Cellphones can make great macro cameras – give yours a try!

A nice advantage of still life macro photography is that, starting out, you needn't spend much to give it a try. See what your cellphone can do. If you already own a DSLR or mirrorless camera, the reversed lens technique can probably be done for under \$25. A good set of extension tubes is currently under \$150. If you find you like macro shooting, then pony up for a dedicated macro lens (where the sky is the limit for price).

9 Tips for Gorgeous Macro Still Life Photography . . . Continued

2. Keep your setup steady

When you're close to your subject and the world is magnified, a millimeter is a significant distance. Sometimes that might be all the depth of field you have. The slightest movement of the camera or the subject will blur the shot or knock it out of focus.

There are many problems you can fix with some skilled editing or specialized plug-ins and add-ons, but out-of-focus images is not one of them. So, if you don't typically use a tripod or other means of steadying your camera, macro still life photography will likely make you a convert. Sometimes with an image-stabilized lens or IBIS (in-body image stabilization) in your camera, you might get away with a handheld shot. Even so, a tripod is always the better option when available.

The eye on the reverse side of a US dollar bill is about 3 mm at the base. When you're in this close, the tiniest vibration or camera movement can blur your shot. Time for the tripod!



3. Consider a focusing rail

As we just discussed, a millimeter can be huge in the world of macro photography. To get good focus on your subject, you can try autofocus, but will the camera focus on the tiny spot you desire? A better option is to move the camera and/or the subject in incremental amounts.

A great way to do this is with a focusing rail. Mount the rail to your tripod, mount your camera to the rail, and now, with knobs and gears that move the camera, you can perform very tiny adjustments to the distance between your camera and subject. Use manual focus to get the point of interest as sharp as you can, then fine-tune with the rail adjustment knobs.



We will discuss focus stacking a little later, but suffice it to say that if you decide to get serious about macro still life photography, sooner or later you will want to buy a focusing rail.

If you get serious about macro photography, sooner or later you'll want a focusing rail like this one!

9 Tips for Gorgeous Macro Still Life Photography . . . Continued

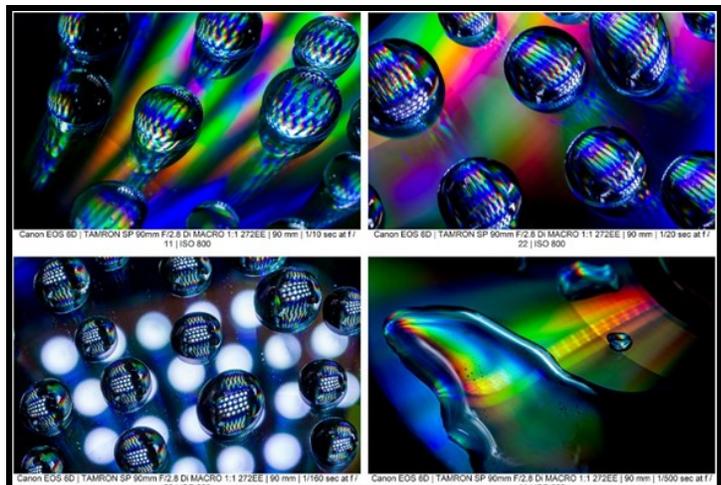
4. Bring in artificial lighting

As with any kind of photography, lighting is a key factor in getting a good image. In macro still life photography, you will have some unique challenges. One of the biggest is that working extremely close to your subject puts you in the way of your own light, so that you or your camera cast shadows on your subject.

And here's the other difficulty: In order to maximize depth of field, you may need to stop down to small apertures, which has the effect of further reducing your light.

There are many ways around this, so I won't begin to recommend a perfect solution. One that often works for me and also can be done on the cheap is inexpensive LED flashlights. Because you can bring your lights close to your subject and use various DIY modifiers, reflectors, flags, and so forth, you can control just how the light interacts with your subject. One issue can be the varied Kelvin temperature of these inexpensive hardware-store flashlights. But if you are shooting RAW (and you are, right?), you can usually deal with this later when editing.

These are water drops on a CD. An LED flashlight created the light dots you see in the droplets.



There are hundreds of other ways to light your macro subjects, and as with all of photography, you should explore what other photographers have done.



Just don't be satisfied by whatever ambient lighting conditions you find. See what you can do to achieve various looks by playing with your lighting. Experimentation is key to creative photography.

Cheap hardware store LED flashlights can often be all you need to light your macro still life subject.

9 Tips for Gorgeous Macro Still Life Photography . . . Continued

5. Adjust your perspective

Another technique in macro still life photography is to find unique angles. Just because you are shooting tiny objects doesn't mean you should always use an overhead view.

If you're shooting bugs, maybe you want to compose from a bug's-eye viewpoint. For flowers, how about getting below and looking up?

If you traditionally shoot handheld shots from eye level, here's your chance to break that habit. The whole idea of macro still life photography is to show things in ways most people never see them – so mix it up and find that unique perspective that will add excitement to your images.

6. Think about compositional guidelines

Just because you're shooting tiny subjects doesn't mean you can forget about standard compositional techniques. Things like the rule of thirds, leading lines, patterns, texture, symmetry, asymmetry, depth of field, lines, curves, frames, contrast, color, viewpoint, depth, negative space, filled space, foreground, background, visual tension, shapes, and the rule of odds will still take your composition to the next level.

Another important consideration is the background. The limited depth of field might aid in making the background soft and compete less with the main subject, but not always. Consider how you can move the camera or subject to have a more pleasing background.

You might also have some colored fabric or paper you can use for backgrounds. I have a small, 20-inch, 5-in-1 reflector that collapses to half its size and fits nicely in my camera bag. I can use it to reflect the light, diffuse the light, or act as a background with its white, black, gold, and silver sides. It's a handy item for macro still life photography.



Think about the background when making your macro images. Here, the lights on the Christmas tree proved a great background, as the limited depth of field created a pleasing bokeh effect.

9 Tips for Gorgeous Macro Still Life Photography . . . Continued

7. Use a tabletop studio, but also go out into nature

What you're photographing and where you're working will greatly change your macro still life photography approach. Because you're probably shooting small subjects, a tabletop can work just fine as your studio.

Working indoors can have distinct advantages: you have full control over subject and camera placement, lighting, backgrounds, and the shooting environment (no wind!). Sometimes, it's nice to be able to photograph flowers in their natural environment, but if you want an exercise in frustration, try macro photography outdoors on a breezy day. Perhaps you could bring some cut flowers indoors. Depending on how you light and shoot your subjects and your choice of background, no one may know they were not photographed outdoors. The beauty of macro is that it's like a movie set – it doesn't matter what's going on outside the frame; your world is that tiny view captured by the camera.

That said, your macro subject will sometimes need to be photographed outdoors where you find it. You can still control what the camera sees through lighting, background choice, *and camera position, though there will be other, harder-to-control elements.*



I enjoy dew-drop photography (it's like diamonds in the grass!). Read all about how to do these kinds of shots in my article, [Just Dew It – Fun with Macro Dewdrop Photography](#).

9 Tips for Gorgeous Macro Still Life Photography . . . Continued

I have great respect for macro photographers whose subjects are live insects. Insects typically don't stay still for very long, and when your depth of field is minimal, keeping insects focused and in the frame can be challenging.

If you do want to photograph insects, try continuous focus, a high shutter speed, and take lots of shots. Another trick is to go out early in the morning after a cold night; the bugs will still be in a state of *torpor*, which means they will be very inactive until they warm up. I have seen some stunning macro shots of dragonflies still covered with morning dew.



Insects can be a challenging but rewarding macro photography subject. The real professionals can fill the frame with the eye of a fly!

If you'll be doing outdoor macro still life photography, another item you might want to add to your camera bag is a plamp. The term comes from two words, plant and clamp, and that's exactly what it is: a clamp for a plant! Wimberley has trademarked the name "Plamp" and you can always buy their commercial version, but if you are a DIYer you might try creating a similar device. Such a gizmo has many uses – it can prevent plants from moving in the wind, and it can also hold things like reflectors and diffusers.



This is a Wimberley plamp and a behind-the-scenes shot of how you might use it.

Wherever and whatever you shoot when doing macro still life photography, remember: digital film is cheap. If it takes several dozen tries to get that one sharp image, it'll be worth it. Shoot lots!

9 Tips for Gorgeous Macro Still Life Photography . . . Continued

8. Focus stack when necessary

One of the biggest challenges in macro photography is getting sufficient depth of field (DOF). Even at a small aperture like f/22, you may have no more than a millimeter of sharp focus.

But there is a work-around technique, called *focus stacking*. You shoot multiple images, each focused on a portion of the subject. Then you combine the files with focus-stacking tools. Photoshop can do this, or you can use specialized programs like Helicon Focus or Zerene Stacker. ON1 Photo Raw also has focus-stacking capabilities.

Focus stacking will put your skills and patience to the test. Some of those impressive close-ups of bugs full of stunning detail might have several dozen images stacked into one to get the necessary depth of field. Make a great focus-stacked image, and you have moved into the higher levels of macro still life photography.



With a depth of field of only a few millimeters, I had to focus stack to try and get the details of this flower at the left in focus. It would have taken many more stacked layers to get the entire flower in focus.

The droplet at the right is only a few millimeters wide, and my depth of field was so small that to get the thread, the droplet, and the refracted image inside all in focus, I had to stack several images together using Photoshop.



9. Look around you

What makes a great subject for macro still life photography? Everything! Things that might not even make you look twice suddenly become interesting when you photograph them at a macro level. You can spend an entire day photographing ordinary household objects in a new way, enjoying the intricate detail of a flower, or appreciating the pattern and texture of a scrap of fabric.

9 Tips for Gorgeous Macro Still Life Photography . . . Continued

To wrap up, I wish you success with your macro still life photography. And to inspire you, let me show you some of the images I've made with this technique.

After you make some still life shots with your standard lens, get out your macro lens for some closer looks.



Stumped for a subject? Fruits and veggies offer all kinds of interesting colors, patterns, and textures that are just right for macro photography. Play with some creative lighting, too.

You'd be surprised by the ordinary things around the house that make interesting subjects for macro still life photography.

When the weather outside gets frosty, put on your coat and your macro lens and explore the wonders of ice and snow patterns.



Got an old, wind-up style watch? The workings can be a fascinating macro subject.

Well, there you have it; so get out, get practicing, and have fun!

Prime vs. Zoom Lenses in Photography

By Gene Rodman

If a budding photographer looks to upgrade a lens, the choices seem endless. Point and shoot cameras come equipped with a zoom lens permanently attached so I'm really talking about those with Digital Single Lens Reflex cameras. DSLR cameras often come with some type of zoom lens or several as a kit to cover a wide variety of focal lengths.

*Photo by Anant Nath Sharma; ISO 100,
f/1.8, 1-second exposure*



- A zoom lens lets the photographer choose different focal lengths, from wide angle to telephoto.
- Zoom lenses have the advantage of allowing the photographer to get closer to a subject without physically moving.
- They also enable the photographer a better chance of getting the shot because the photographer can compose and shoot without changing lenses.
- There is also less chance of getting dust on the sensor from constantly changing lenses.

When zoom lenses first came onto the market they were heavy and the quality of the images they produced could not compare to a fixed focal length (prime) lens. The quality has improved greatly because of computer design but there is usually a fall off of image quality as the lens is zoomed to longer focal lengths.

Prime vs. Zoom Lenses in Photography . . . Continued

Back in the day serious photographers had a variety of fixed focal length lenses in their camera bag that were very sharp. They included a few fast (large maximum aperture) prime lenses: a wide angle lens (20-28mm), a normal 50mm lens, a portrait lens (80-105mm), and a longer lens (180-200mm) that could be used as a head and shoulders portrait lens or for sports and wildlife photography.

So why should a person carry all these different lenses when one or two zoom lenses could easily cover all the focal lengths and even the intermediary ones too?

There are images that you simply cannot capture with a zoom lens:

- Prime lenses let in much more light than a zoom lens. Whereas a zoom may have a maximum aperture of say f 3.5-f 5.6 prime lenses have a maximum more like f 1.4-f 2. Aperture settings (along with focal length and distance to the subject) control what appears sharp in a photograph. By controlling what is sharp the photographer can guide the viewer's eyes to important parts of the image. When you use these lenses at their widest apertures, it allows a photographer to isolate a subject from the foreground and background because at these apertures depth of field is very shallow. By using selective focusing this narrow depth of field allows for only a narrow area in the image to be sharp. In a portrait it is very important to isolate the subject from its surroundings. If you look at ads in magazines, you will see how selective focusing and narrow depth of field are used to isolate the product name or some point of interest in the ad. Your eye naturally moves to the sharpest part of an image.
- There are other advantages to using prime lenses. When you are able to let more light into the camera for exposure, there is less of a need to raise your ISO and by doing so introduce noise into your image.
- Most prime lenses have depth of field scales on them so you can calculate what in your image will be in focus. I use these scales all the time with my scenic images because I want everything in the image to be in focus. It really bugs me when someone shows me an image where the foreground is out of focus or the background is soft because the depth of field was not great enough to encompass both the foreground and background in the image.

Prime vs. Zoom Lenses in Photography . . . Continued

- Since prime lenses have the ability to let more light into the camera, exposure metering is more accurate and auto focusing is faster. How many times do you have your zoom lens extended all the way and the auto focus searches for a focusing point? It is because there is not enough light entering the lens for the auto focusing and metering system to work properly.
- Prime lenses will also be sharper and focus closer than the same focal length on a zoom lens.
- A prime lens will only give you one angle of view and it is a good exercise to photograph with just one focal length. By doing this the photographer is able to discover what are the benefits and limitation of each of the lenses and their focal lengths. I feel that many photographers get lazy with zoom lenses. They won't move for a change in perspective or to get a better angle on their subject.

Zoom lenses are here to stay and as the quality of these lenses increases, many will keep only one lens on their camera that will satisfy most of their needs for the way they photograph. Although I see the need for zoom lenses for photojournalism, weddings and some portraits where it is important to be able to get the photograph quickly, I will keep my camera bag stocked with my favorite prime lenses and use them when I know I want the very best image I can get.

PICTURECORRECT.com

RM