



FINE ART FLOWERS

Quick Guide
Written by Stacey Hill



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Photograph by Stacey Hill

Flowers are an infinitely rewarding subject to shoot. There is amazing variety, which changes as the seasons turn over. In fact, their ephemeral existence make capturing good flower images both challenging and satisfying. Because flowers do not last long, you have to stir yourself to actively seek them out at their peak, and they may bloom well or not at all depending on the conditions.

Spring can therefore be a time of great activity for a flower photographer. Also, it's a season prone to uncertain weather, making the level of difficulty even higher depending on your local weather patterns.

Then there is the choice on how to capture the images. Will you opt for a classic portrait style, one single bloom outlined against a background? Or perhaps a wide-angle garden shot of a riot of color? Macro? Soft focus? Something creative and artistic?

Capturing the essence of a flower in the wild or the garden is not easy; the slightest breeze can cause movement. You have little control of the light, and backgrounds may be messy and distracting. Other plants can intrude into the shot.



Photograph by Stacey Hill

Much patience is required when choosing the right conditions to go out, possibly more than once to get the desired images. Public gardens are a good option for a range of flowers, but staff will be quite grumpy with you setting up a tripod in the middle of the flowerbed and walking all over it to get the perfect shot.

You can also pick or buy flowers and take them home to shoot. This gives you a lot more control over the light and you can keep them still. Making those kind of shots look natural and wild might be an issue if that is the style of shot you want to take.

There are many different options and choices, so let's look at some examples from other flower photographers around the world.

⚠ Important Note: There are many options for capturing flower images, but the most natural ones require us to be out in nature with them.

📖 Recommended Reading: Want to create gorgeous, perfectly lit flower photographs? Grab a copy of Photzy's premium guide: [Photographing Fabulous Flowers](#).

INSPIRATIONS

There are many talented fine art flower photographers about. I would like to share with you a few of my personal inspirations:

- **Kathleen Clemons** is an American photographer who has a couple of courses on Creative Live. I have done one of them and found it immensely valuable, especially in her approach to shooting flowers in the garden.

She has many useful tips about shooting to minimize clutter in the background and some clever ways to help move other flowers out of the way of your primary subject without damaging the plants.

[Check out her work here.](#)

- **Polina Plotnikova** is a Russian photographer who creates very creative and artistic flower imagery with multiple exposures and uses a lot of the Lensbaby range of lenses. I first saw her work featured in a magazine.

[Check out her work here.](#)

- **Marina De Wit** is a New Zealand photographer who says she only has ONE lens for her camera and produces some astonishing work with it. She has a unique style of editing her images, one which I have tried to emulate with limited success.

[Check out her work here.](#)

- **Sylvia Slavin** is a British photographer who creates lovely soft and artistic floral images, often using soft focus, multiple exposure, or intentional camera movement techniques.

[Check out her work here.](#)

- **Denise Love** of 2 Lil Owls Studio creates wonderful flower and still life photography. She creates a lot of macro images and has a range of alternative lenses she likes to shoot with for creative outcomes. There are a range of workshops available on her site, including flower and macro photography.

[Check out her work here.](#)

You can see from the diverse range of work from these photographers that flowers can be shot in a variety of ways, limited only by your imagination.

⚠ Important Note: Look at the work featured on the links provided. You can see they all have a unique style. There is no single way to capture flower images.

Let us look at some of the considerations when shooting flowers and some of the techniques and concepts you can use.



Photograph by Stacey Hill

SHOOTING FLOWERS IN A FINE ART STYLE

BACKGROUND

- Where possible, make sure the background is uncluttered.
- Choose a contrasting background color to your subject so it stands out against it.
- Have the subject far enough away from the background so you can get good separation and produce nice bokeh and blur.

In the example image on the left of some cherry blossoms beginning to open, the green background was a large hedge. I angled the shot so that the hedge filled the background and shot with my macro lens around F4.5. This completely blurred the background detail to a single mass of green, contrasting nicely with the bright-pink cherry buds.



Photograph by Stacey Hill

ISOLATE THE SUBJECT

The obvious answer to this is pick the flower and take it home to shoot in the studio, but this is often not possible. We cannot go randomly picking the best roses out of the local public gardens or bring home large branches of magnolia flowers.

Therefore, we have to be patient, prepared, and creative with our shooting.

Early morning is often a good time to shoot, with soft light and often little breeze. And limited random bystanders to watch you working!

The occasional still, overcast day is a good one. Sometimes before a rain front comes over it can get very still.

Choose your camera angles well. Using a longer focal length macro like 100mm or 180mm can help you capture flowers from further away. Even a normal telephoto lens can be used if that is what you have available.

I usually shoot around F4.5, which helps isolate the flower but blur the background enough.



Photograph by Stacey Hill

Shot with a Lensbaby Velvet 56 for a deliberate soft glow effect.

Find a bud on the end of a branch or a cluster of flowers that you can get close to. Use your aperture choice creatively to isolate further if needed.

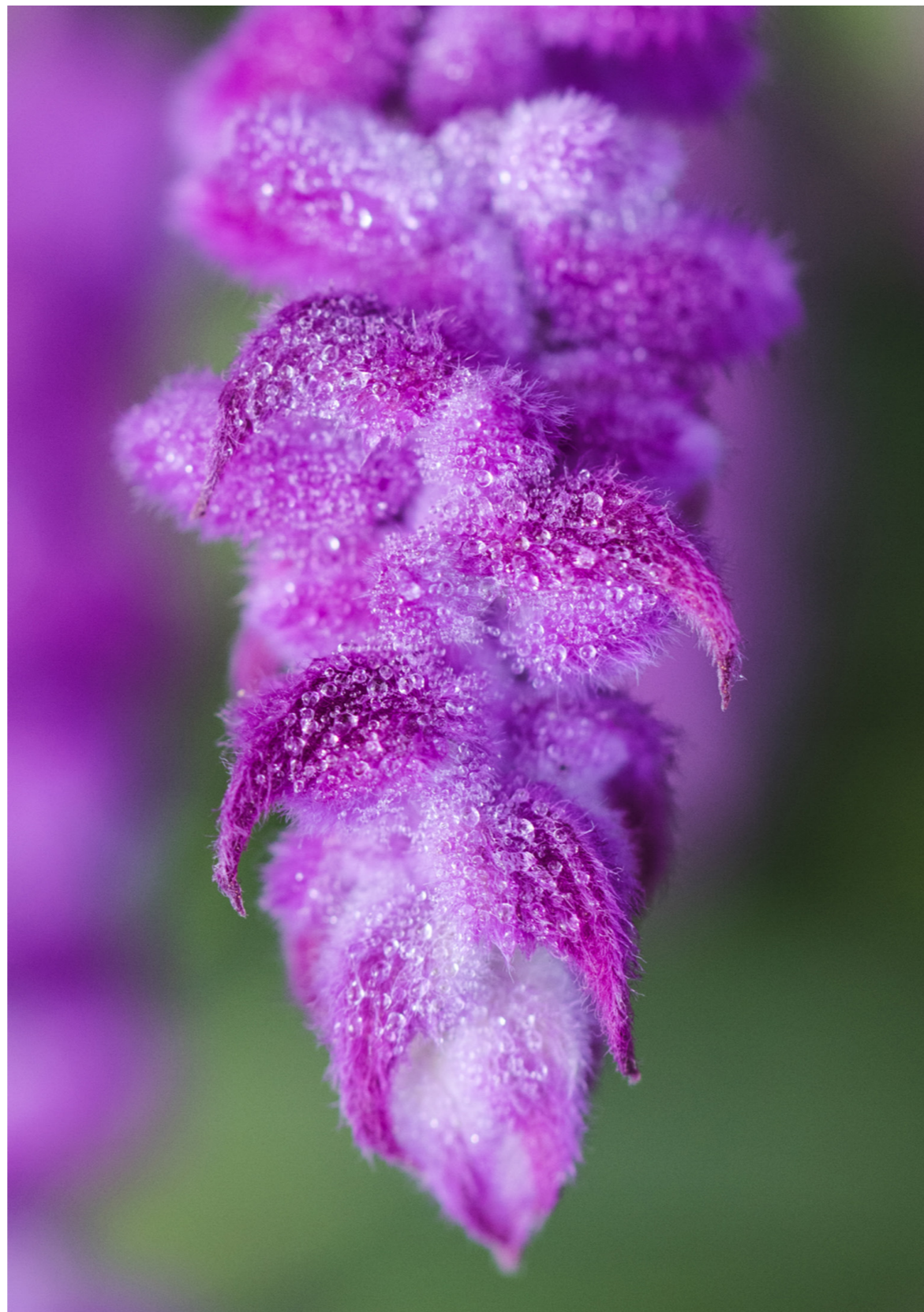
LENS CHOICES

There are lots of different lens options. Macro 100mm and 180mm (or your camera brand equivalent) are popular for flower photography.

Lensbaby gives you many creative soft focus, blur, or localized focus options, depending on which one you use.

Vintage lenses like Helios and Vivitar have some interesting optical effects like swirly bokeh, etc., which add extra impact to your images.

Generally, you want something that lets in a lot of light, so many people prefer lenses that have at least F2.8 aperture capability. You may need to shoot with faster shutter speeds in variable light when outside, so fast glass helps with keeping your ISO down and minimizing noise.



Photograph by Stacey Hill

Canon's 100mm F2.8 IS L macro lens can pick up the tiniest details, like these dew drops on a fluffy salvia bloom.

COMPOSITION

All of the above steps are what you need to take into consideration for your final composition.

- a) What is your subject?
 - Is it a single bud or flower?
 - Will it be a large view of a garden?
 - Or perhaps a cluster of flowers?
- b) How will you shoot it?
 - Can you get close enough?
 - Do you have the right lens or focal length to capture the image the way you want to?
- c) What issues do you have?
 - Can you isolate a hero flower to shoot if necessary?
 - Can you work with the background?

- What interference do you have in the image? What will distract the viewer's eye?

Once you establish these key elements then you further need to consider the following questions:

- Can you achieve a clean background?
- Will it give you sufficient contrast?
- What lens and focal length will you need to shoot with/at?
- How close will you be to the subject?
- What are the light and conditions like, and how will they affect your settings?
- What aperture will work best for the conditions and for the creative outcome you want?
- Will you need a tripod, or can you shoot freehand?



Photograph by Stacey Hill

This blossom was selected because it was partially isolated but filled with other blossoms in the background, so a macro lens with a small aperture would blur everything else around it.



Photograph by Stacey Hill

Viburnum from my garden, shot with Lensbaby Velvet 56 against my painted background. It looks a little bluer than usual because of the final edit.

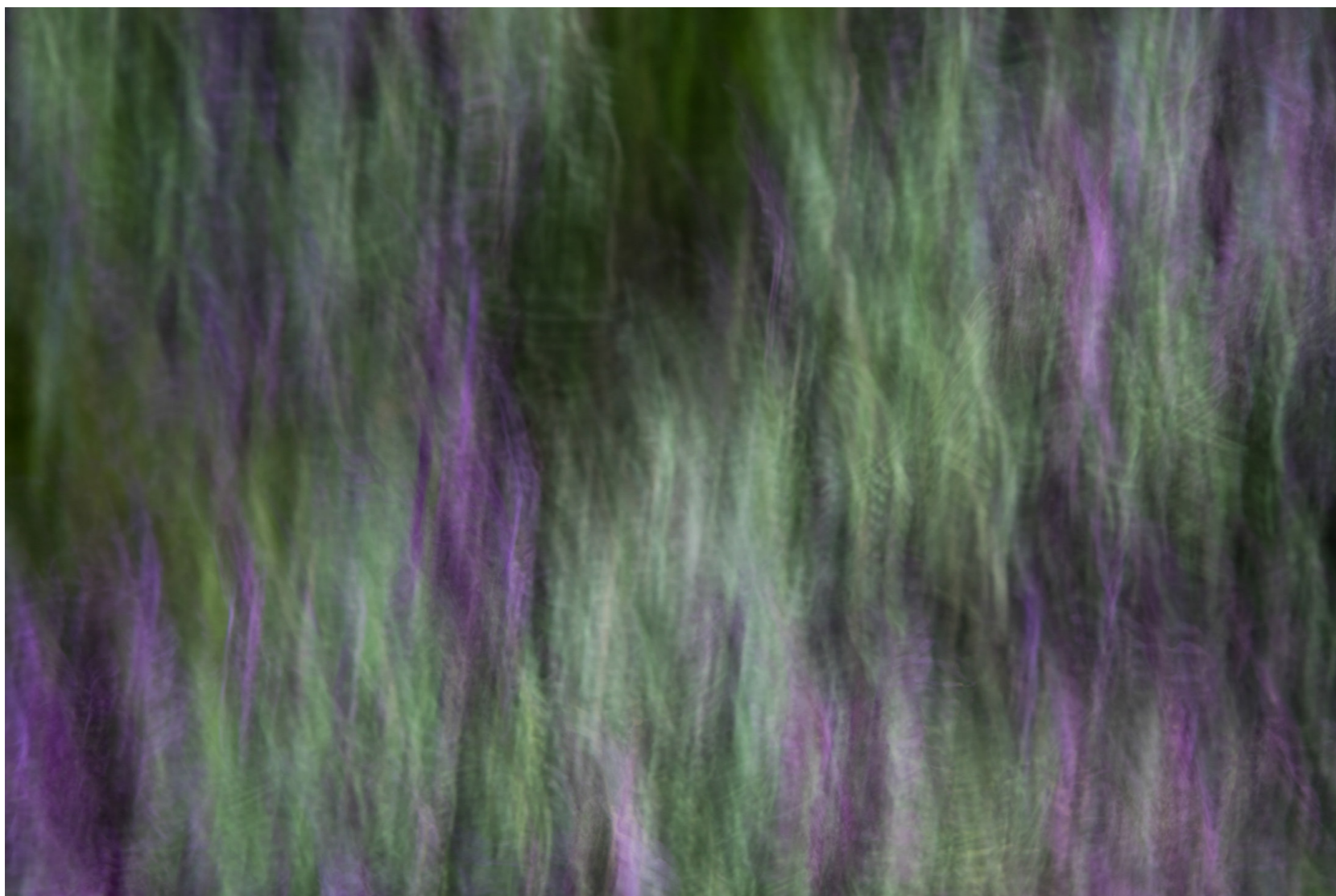
These are some of the key considerations especially for when you are shooting outside. You have a bit more control over the light and the stability of the flower in a studio, but your creative choices regarding aperture, lens, and focal length still apply.

You may also need to consider what background you are using in a studio. Will it look natural or are you going for a more stylistic approach? These are key composition concepts you need to decide on.

I have painted a background in random shades of green (and hints of blue), which look like dark foliage when used.

⚠ Important Note: As with all photography, composition is critical. When you are shooting flowers naturally, it can be very difficult to account for many factors outside of your control. Be prepared.

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Photograph by Stacey Hill

A large lavender plant in bloom taken with ICM.

CREATIVE CHOICES

This is where the fun begins. All of the image examples in this guide so far are what could generally be considered flower portraits. The use of the Lensbaby has added a creative element to some, but what are our other choices?

- Special effects
- Multiple exposures (if your camera offers this option, or you can try it in post-processing)
- Intentional camera movement (ICM) (by using a slow shutter speed while moving the camera to get a creative outcome).

I have been experimenting with ICM over the past few months and have found that flowers make an interesting subject. If you have a large patch of small flowers or a larger garden area with a mass of images that you want to interpret in a new way, ICM can be fun to play with.



Photograph by Stacey Hill

A bright pink watsonia taken with ICM.



Photograph by Stacey Hill

An old-fashioned rose taken with a rotating ICM movement.



Photograph by Stacey Hill



Photograph by Stacey Hill

POST-PROCESSING

Shooting in RAW is recommended. Using software to process your RAW file allows you to do standard edits and potentially creative ones as well.

I use Lightroom to do all my basic edits. I also have a large collection of creative presets that I like to use.

Here is an example of a before and after shot done via Lightroom edits.

On top is the original RAW file, unedited. On the bottom is the 'after' image, cropped and edited only in Lightroom.



Photograph by Stacey Hill



Photograph by Stacey Hill

On the left is the 'before' original unedited RAW. On the right is the 'after' image, cropped and edited in Lightroom.

I use my editing in two ways. Sometimes I want to preserve the natural colors of the subjects and I edit for that. Other times I want to tell more of a story, to change the focus of the image, to highlight one part and draw the eye in to a specific point.

Selective, careful, localized adjustments can achieve this. You may not agree with the ways in which I have edited my images, which is perfectly fine. However, you cannot disagree that there is a significant difference between the original unedited RAW file and my final edited file.

These examples are presented to show you what is possible to achieve in the editing process. You are free to make your own choices on how you edit your images, and that is one of the joys of flower photography. They lend themselves well to different outcomes.



Photograph by Stacey Hill

The concept was trying to give the feeling of a ballerina dancing, but with a flower instead.

If you want to go all the way to town, you can then take your image into Photoshop (or a similar program) and have more fun with it. In the example on the left, I selected individual petals and then stretched and warped them, blurred them, and put them in as background layers against the main flower.

One of the things I like to do with my editing is to partially desaturate the image and add a light matte finish. I also like to deepen the shadows, which helps minimize a lot of foliage distraction, and add a vignette to focus the eye on the relevant part of the image.

In the shot of the wisteria above, I have highlighted the three main flowers with rain drops on them in the middle, partly due to the use of the soft vignette on the sides with a slightly darker one at the top and bottom to frame.



Photograph by Stacey Hill

For comparison, this was the original image used.

If you have lots of florets/blooms in the image, carefully using a vignette can be especially useful to bring the attention where you want it to be if you weren't able to isolate it with your aperture.

⚠ Important Note: There are lots of opportunities to be creative with flower images – they seem particularly suited to it in many ways. Try new things, like ICM, multiple exposures, and so on.

📖 Recommended Reading: Want to create gorgeous, perfectly lit flower photographs? Grab a copy of Photzy's premium guide: [Photographing Fabulous Flowers.](#)



Photograph by Stacey Hill



Photograph by Stacey Hill

A peony with the petals beginning to dry and curl up.

CONCLUSION

If you visit the links posted in the inspiration section, it will show you many different and diverse ways that flower images can be captured in a fine art style. There are many choices of ways to capture and present flower images, and it's really only limited to your personal preferences and capabilities.

Flowers can be light and airy, bright and colorful, windblown, high key, dark and moody, richly colored, pale pastels, hard and sharp, or soft and blurred. The many choices make for so much possibility and offer a great variety to your portfolio.

Some people even prefer the wabi-sabi effect and capture the ephemeral fleeting nature of flowers as they fade away. Tulips are a particular favorite with the way the petals dry and curl. I've heard of some photographers having to rescue their mostly dead bunch of flowers from the bin, thrown out by a family member who didn't understand why there was still a bunch of dead flowers in the house!

Therefore, I ask you to consider to expand your horizons. Maybe start with a bunch of flowers at home to experiment with. Flowers bloom in spring and summer and still through autumn in many places. Winter brings berries, stark shapes of branches, dried leaves, frost patterns, and so on.

Nature has much to offer us visually. Many people are seduced by the grandeur of large landscapes,

but there is much value to be found at a smaller scale. Trust me, landscapes generally stay still even on the windiest of days, so getting a good shot of a flower outside is more of a challenge than you might think!

Sit in a garden, be present, enjoy the moments, hear the hum of the bees. Let it speak to you in a way you may not have heard before.

Self-Check Quiz:

- 1) Flowers are a bit boring, aren't they?
- 2) Do you have to shoot flowers outside in the garden?
- 3) Which is the best lens to shoot with?
- 4) What's a multiple exposure?
- 5) What's ICM?

Answers:

- 1) Your preference may lie in other areas, but flowers are not at all boring
- 2) Natural images will need to be shot outside, but you can pick or buy blooms to shoot in the studio. It's a good place to start learning.
- 3) Most people prefer a macro of around 100mm.
- 4) Multiple exposure is when your camera can be setup to take several different frames and combine them in-camera, so you have multiple shots combined in one image. Some cameras only allow two frames, whereas some will shoot up to 9-10. Not all cameras have this function, so check your manual.
- 5) ICM is intentional camera movement. You slow the shutter speed down (and usually use a neutral density filter to control the light) and move the camera while the shot is being taken to intentionally introduce blur.



Hey there!

Let's get real for a minute... Learning photography can be super challenging! But we're here to help you every step of the way! Here are 3 of our most useful (*and FREE!*) photography resources:



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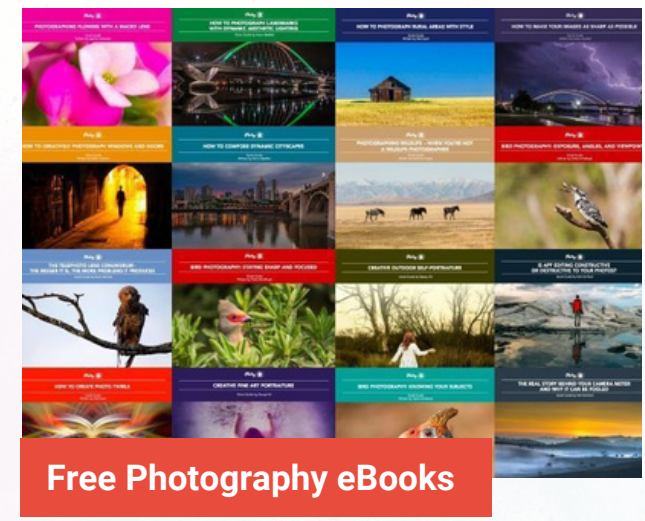
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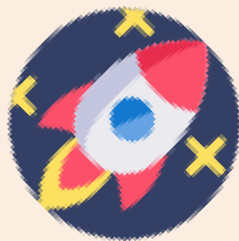
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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Stacey Hill invested in her first DSLR back in 2007. While having many adventures out and about in the South Island of New Zealand, Stacey took to blogging about her experiences learning photography. Eventually she discovered the fun and creative possibilities to be had with Photoshop. Stacey can be found having an opinion all over the place:



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