
OUT THE BACKDOOR: SHOOTING IN YOUR BACKYARD

Quick Guide
Written by Leanne Cleaveley



Before you dive into this guide, here's a few other free resources to help you learn photography:



What is Your #1 Photography Killer?

Take this 30 second quiz to find out the #1 thing holding your photography back.

[Take Quiz →](#)



3 Free Photography Cheat Sheets

Grab 3 free photography cheat sheets that will help you understand the basics.

[Download Cheat Sheets →](#)



Free Photography eBooks

Free access to our library of 250+ downloadable (pdf) tutorials on everything you can imagine.

[Download eBooks →](#)



Want quick photography tips?

Check out our friends at DailyPhotoTips.com they'll send you 1 solid photography tip to your inbox, 5 days a week. So you can start your day right, with actionable tips to help you on your creative journey. [Subscribe now →](#) (free for a limited time)

Have you ever found yourself at a loss for what to photograph? Have you found yourself floundering for inspiration? Have you hoped that some wonderful idea would pull you out of a photography funk? We have all been there at some point. You feel uninspired and can't really summon the energy to just get out and shoot.

The problem with photography funks is that if they go on too long, they can become a habit. And we know that regular practice builds better understanding and skill. I have always aimed for daily photography practice, but as anyone who has done a 365 project will know, that goal can feel pretty daunting some days.

I personally feel that there are two things that will pull me out of a photography rut: practicing a new or different type of photography and new or interesting subjects. One of the things that has saved me from being stuck is having a bit of a back-up plan for when things get tough (and they will!).


Some photographers are of the mindset that they must travel far from home to find a spectacular image. Certain subjects—scenic landscapes, for example—often do require you to drive to a particular location to view them. However, I want to

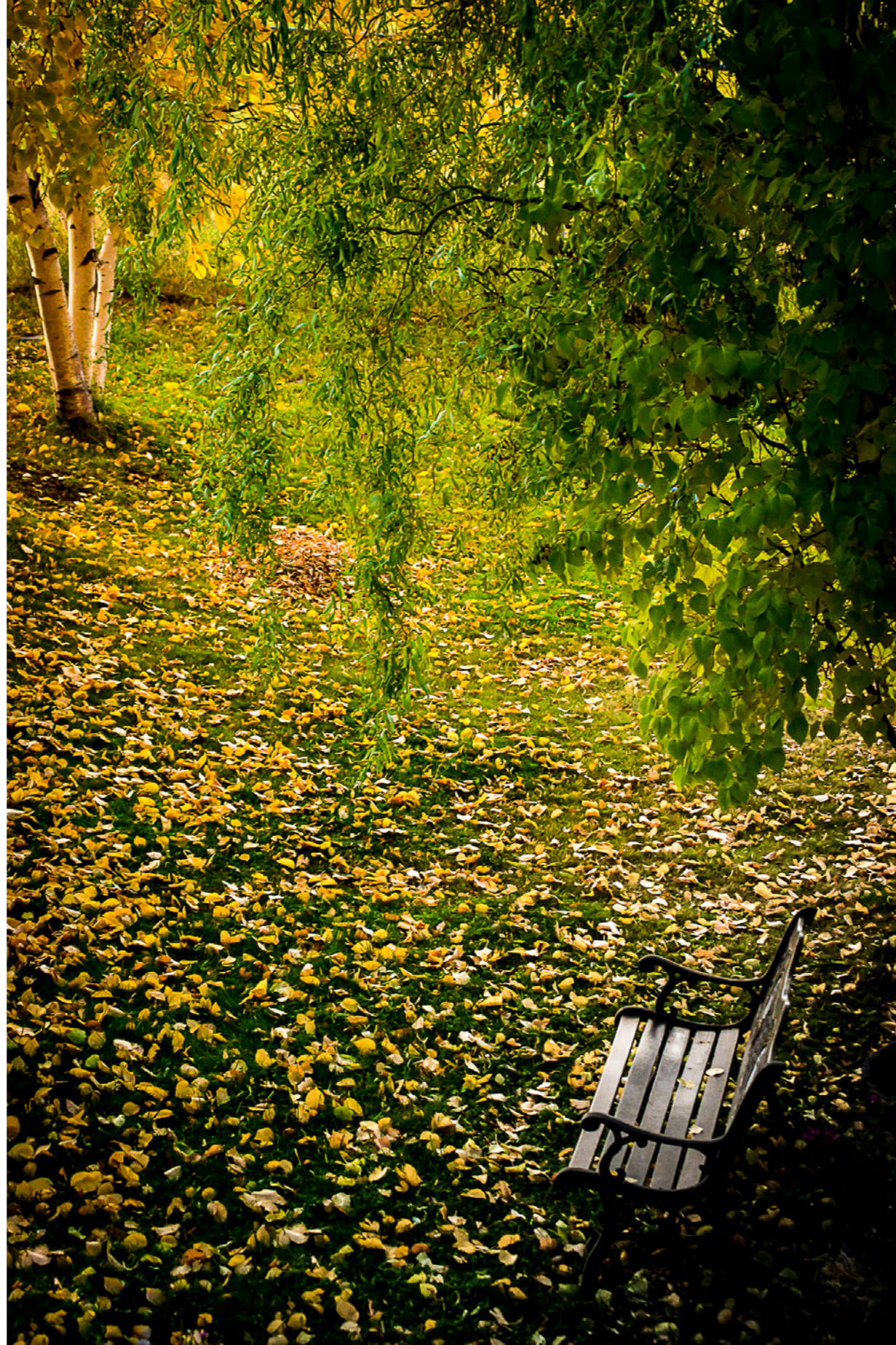
present the idea that you can shoot a great variety of subjects and utilize diverse photographic strategies in your own backyard.

Your backyard is filled with a multitude of subjects, both big and small, just waiting for you and your camera. By exploring your backyard daily, you can build a very good practice that helps you to further develop your skills so that when you do get that opportunity to venture out, you are ready to make the most of it.

When you have finished this guide, I hope to have provided you with:

- a plan to break any future photography ruts you might find yourself in
- a new perspective on where you can find great images
- some photographic inspiration for how to capture great images in your own backyard

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



Photograph by Leanne Cleaveley



Photograph by Leanne Cleaveley

I love capturing candid shots of my family in the backyard, like this image. The beauty of shots like these is that you don't need a lot of fancy equipment. It was shot with a D3100 at ISO 400, f/8, and 1/250th sec at 55mm.

YOUR BACKYARD

First off, I need to clarify what backyard means, as it can encompass more than what a traditional backyard might be. These are outdoor spots that are easily accessible. They are places that you can visit every day without it becoming too much of a burden.

I count my actual backyard, the front yard, the deck, and even an adjacent school field as my “backyard.” That definition may change for those of you that live in a city. Perhaps your backyard is a nearby park, a community garden, or a rooftop space. For our purposes, any outdoor location that doesn't mean getting into a car or going on a long trek fits the bill.

Once you have figured out what your backyard is, you need to spend some time preparing to shoot in that space, which brings us to our next topic: equipment.



Photograph by Leanne Cleaveley

Capturing small subjects, such as the snowflake in this image, can require the use of a macro lens. The gear you need for shooting in your backyard will depend on your subjects and how you want to photograph them.

WHAT YOU WILL NEED

The beauty of backyard photography is that it can be as simple or as complicated as you want it to be. I use anything from my mobile device to a DSLR with a tripod and ND filters to shoot in this space. It all depends on what I am shooting and how I am feeling on any given day.

Your gear will be dependent on what kind of photography you are doing, of course. Long exposure photography or low-light conditions may dictate the need for a tripod. Shooting birds and other wildlife may make it necessary to have a zoom lens at the ready. Getting some creative flower images may necessitate the need for a macro lens.

If you are just starting out, you can slowly add gear as your needs and interests dictate. So don't feel like you must rush out and buy a bunch of equipment right away. If you are lucky enough to own a lot of gear, then the beauty of backyard photography is that you will have it close at hand for when you want to change things up.

WHAT TO PHOTOGRAPH

The backyard is an ever-changing space that offers a variety of subjects to shoot. My backyard probably differs from yours due to geographical location and climate, but here are a few subjects you might expect to see through the seasons:

The backyard through the seasons – what you might find:


Winter – frost, snow, ice, the skeletal remains of trees and other foliage, holiday lights, winter wildlife and birds, colorful sunrises and sunsets (the angle of the sun can give us some beautifully colored skies)

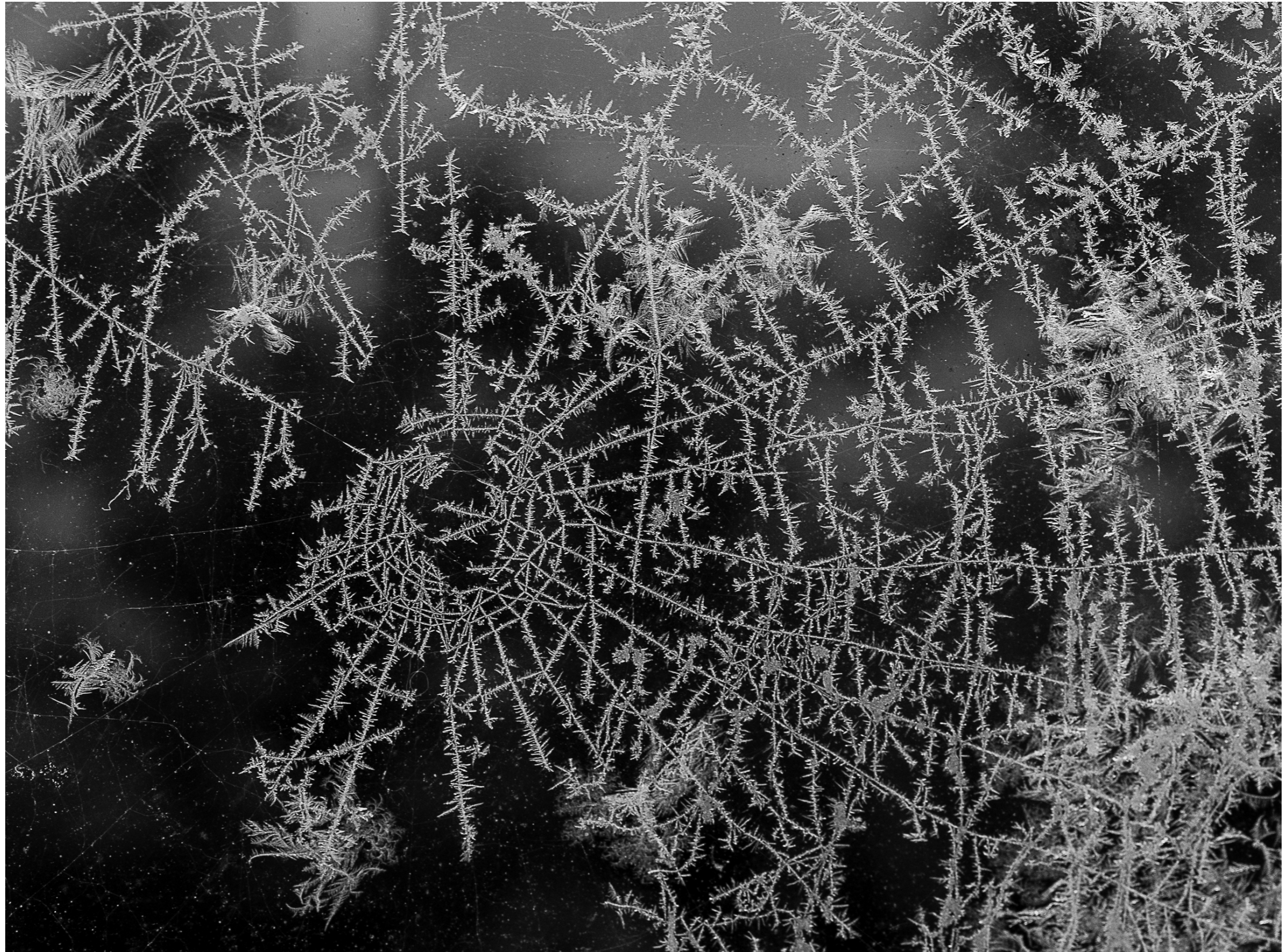
Spring – new growth, insects and arachnids, migrating birds and wildlife, water in many forms (rain, waterdrops, etc.), changing weather (we get some pretty dramatic weather changes in the spring that can be fun to photograph)

Summer – plants in full bloom, wildlife and insects, pets, people, gardens (vegetable and floral)

Fall – colorful foliage, decaying flora, migrating birds and wildlife, frost, fog, stars and aurora (this is my favorite season for this as temperatures are mild and the nights are longer than in the summer)

The list shown here is not exhaustive but can provide a great start for building your own list of subjects that you might find in your backyard space. I have a constantly evolving list of things I want to try. This can be a big help on days when I lack inspiration.

 **Key Lesson:** Keep a list of subjects that you intend to shoot in your backyard. For those days when you just can't find inspiration, you can simply pull out the list for ideas. Write it down or you risk forgetting that great idea!



Photograph by Leanne Cleaveley

Frost makes for an interesting subject and so do spider webs, so how about frosted spiderwebs like the one in this image? Spending a few minutes in your backyard each day can offer up some interesting and even surprising things to photograph.



Photograph by Leanne Cleaveley

Taking the time to learn how to master shots of the moon and stars can be very rewarding for photographers. This image was taken at ISO 800, f7.1, and 1/3rd sec using a tripod for stability at a focal length of 210mm.

MY TOP THREE

I am going to share my top three favorite backyard subjects and some of the techniques that I like to use when shooting them. These subjects are general enough to encompass many genres and photographic techniques.

THE SKY


The sky is a constantly changing subject that offers a variety of ways to be photographed. The sky from morning to night can change drastically. From the lovely blues of twilight to the warm colors of sunrise, the palette of the sky is constantly changing. Throw in some clouds or interesting weather phenomenon and you have even more to work with. And just when you think the sky has given you all it possibly could, you find yourself photographing the stars, the moon, satellites, and auroras.

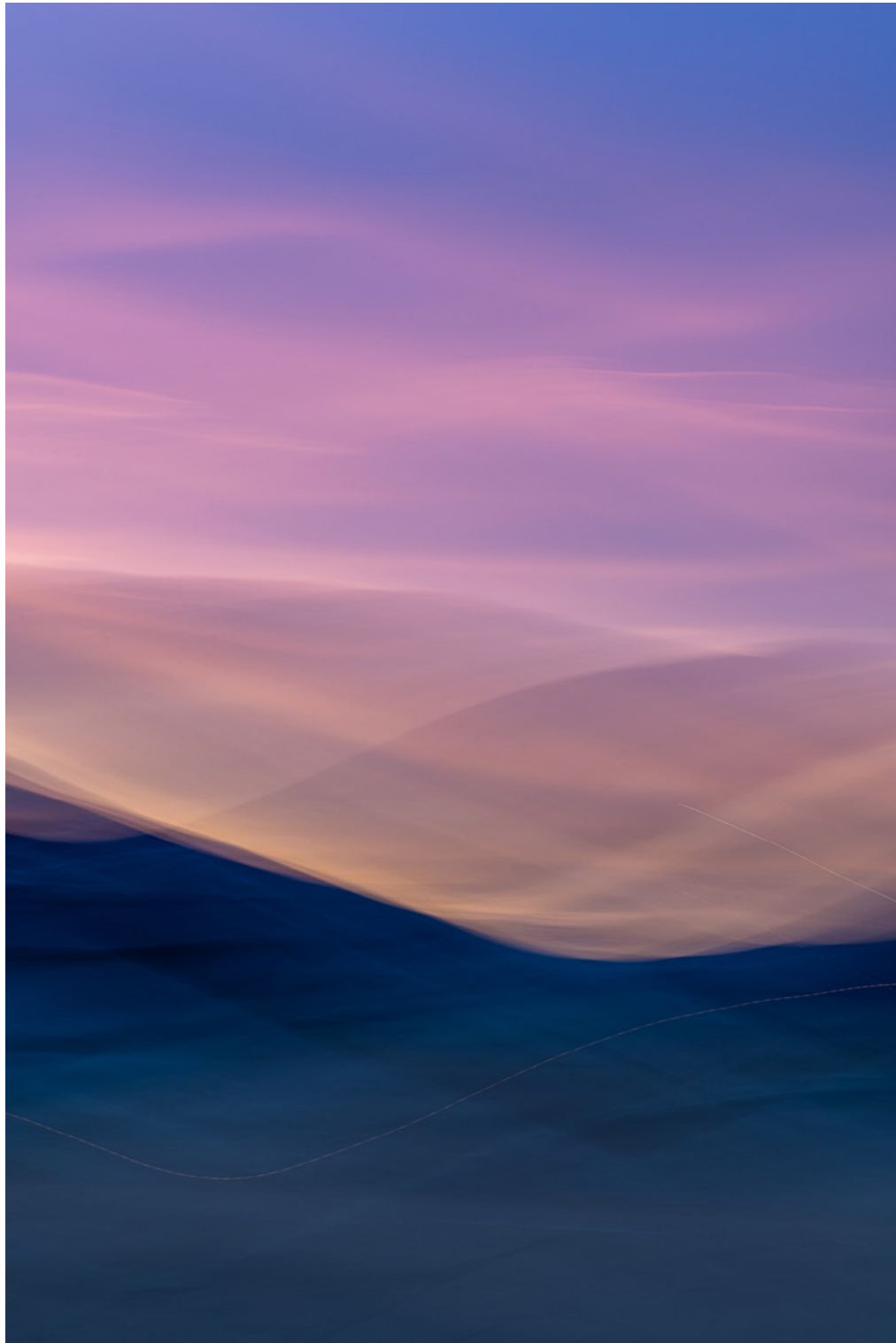


Photograph by Leanne Cleaveley

This image was shot from my back deck. The clouds had some lovely color and texture which drew me out to photograph them. After a few shots, I decided to try a shot using intentional camera movement, as seen in the image on the next page. Sweeping the camera left to right over the same scene, you get a very different image.

If at some point you grow weary of the sky, you can try your hand at long exposure shots using a neutral density filter or even intentional camera movement. These can create surreal-looking images that differ from your traditional sunrise or sunset images.

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



Photograph by Leanne Cleaveley



Photograph by Leanne Cleaveley

If you are lucky enough to live far enough north or south, you may get a chance to photograph the aurora australis or aurora borealis, like the one shown in this image. The image was shot from my back deck using a 15-second exposure at ISO 800 and f3.5. Following an aurora tracker is a great way to know when these amazing displays will take place so that you can capture an image.



Photograph by Leanne Cleaveley

Backyards are a great place to discover both big and small wildlife to photograph. This image of a grasshopper was taken using a 90mm macro lens at ISO 640, f25 at 1/320th sec.

FAUNA

The living creatures that you find in your backyard can provide ample opportunity to practice your photography skills. From migrating birds to the neighbor's pets and even down to the tiny ants that inhabit your lawn or garden, you can find an interesting critter to shoot almost any day or season.

Take some time to get to know the wildlife and insects in your area. Some birds may only appear for brief moments in the spring or fall as they pass through on their migration. Consider offering food to entice a few into your backyard, or take the time to grow some flowering plants that will attract butterflies, bees, and other insects.



Photograph by Leanne Cleaveley

Seeds or seed-bearing plants can entice certain birds into your backyard, offering a great opportunity to capture photographs of them. This Steller's Jay was captured while visiting the backyard looking for food.



Photograph by Leanne Cleaveley

This image was shot at ISO 400, f13, 1/200th sec with a 90mm lens. The backyard can be a wonderful place to practice your hand at posed shots of your family and friends.

Not to be forgotten when considering “fauna” in your backyard are people. My family is one of my favorite things to photograph, and the backyard, with natural light and nice backgrounds, is a great place to capture both candid and posed shots.



Photograph by Leanne Cleaveley

Flowers, like the one shown in this image, make great subjects for photography. Consider shooting them in different ways: macro, wide-angle, monochrome, abstract, and using intentional camera movement are just some of the techniques you can use.

FLORA

From a weed growing up through the cracks in a paving stone to large trees, you can always find inspiration for images in the flora of your backyard. Some days I seek out the details in a delicate flower or the bark of a tree. Other days I love shooting the leaves and shadows of a tree or sunflower at sunset.



Photograph by Leanne Cleaveley

Consider shooting flora, like the leaves in this image, all through the seasons. From spring bud to colorful foliage in the fall, leaves offer an ever-changing variety.

Because flora can change dramatically through the seasons, you have an ever-evolving subject waiting for you to photograph it in a new way. Consider shooting flora not just in its prime but also when young buds are bursting out in the spring or when the slow cycle of decay occurs through the fall and winter months.

💎 Key Lesson: Be sure to photograph the same subjects as the seasons change. Subjects found in nature, such as plants and wildlife, can go through some profound changes and offer some unique opportunities for creating interesting photographs.

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



Photograph by Leanne Cleaveley

Seeds, like the ones in this image, can make for an interesting subject. Juxtaposed against a chain-link fence, you get a glimpse of nature meeting man-made in your own backyard.



Photograph by Leanne Cleaveley

THE GREAT OUTDOORS

Your backyard is packed with an amazing variety of subjects just waiting for you to photograph them. Getting out every day and exploring them can build a very good practice and provide the opportunity for some fantastic images.

So, take a walk around your house and observe the flora and fauna there. Spend some time on your back deck or patio watching the sky. And have your camera at the ready for that next great shot.

Learning Assignment:

Shooting Assignment #1

Choose a backyard subject that you feel you have photographed a lot and try one of the following:

- Shoot it as a silhouette – place your subject between you and a strong light source (it could be the sun) and adjust your exposure so that your subject is black (underexposed). This is a great way to shoot easily recognized subjects, like flowers, or subjects that have an interesting texture.
- Shoot using ICM – set your camera for a slightly longer exposure (this can be a second or two) and adjust your other settings to expose the scene correctly. As you press the shutter, move the camera across the scene. Move up, down, side to side, or even give the camera a jiggle. You can get some very interesting and sometimes surprising images using this technique. I love shooting trees and sunsets this way.
- Shoot an abstract - Change your perspective in a big way by getting much closer to your subject or completely changing your position in relation to it. Observe shapes and colors and capture an abstract of your subject.

Shooting Assignment #2

- Go outside early in the morning or in the evening on a sunny day. Find flora or structures in your backyard that are casting shadows and incorporate the shadows into your image. Look for interesting shapes and how they accentuate your subject.



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:



3 Free Photography Cheat Sheets

Grab 3 free photography cheat sheets that will help you understand the basics.

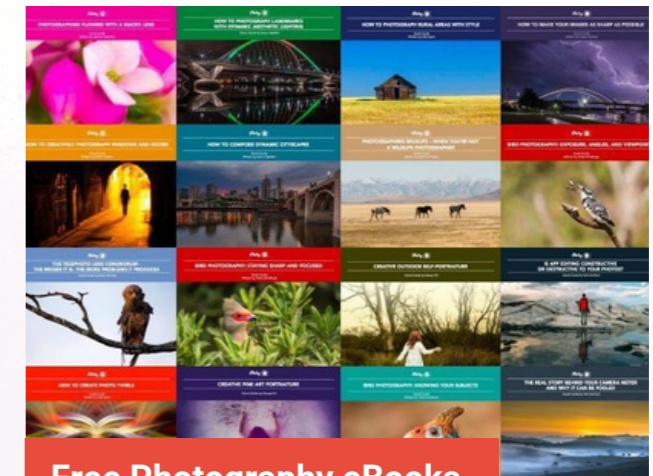
[Download Cheat Sheets →](#)



What is Your #1 Photography Killer?

Take this 30 second quiz to find out the #1 thing holding your photography back.

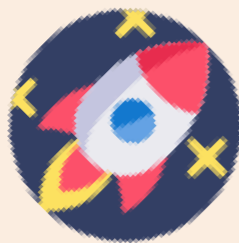
[Take Quiz →](#)



Free Photography eBooks

Free access to our library of 250+ downloadable (pdf) tutorials on everything you can imagine.

[Download eBooks →](#)



Want quick photography tips?

Check out our friends at DailyPhotoTips.com they'll send you 1. solid photography tip to your inbox, 5 days a week. So you can start your day right, with actionable tips to help you on your creative journey. [Subscribe now →](#) (free for a limited time)

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Leanne Cleaveley is a hobby photographer, part-time elementary school teacher, and full-time mother and wife. She loves reading, gardening, crafting and music – and contemplates ways to find more time in the day to pursue her hobbies. Her photographs can be found at [flickr](#).

Congratulations! You've completed this Photzy guide!

If you liked this photography tutorial from Leanne, you may be interested in her other books. Check out Leanne's premium guide on how to turn disappointing flower images into gorgeous and perfectly lit flower photographs: [Photographing Fabulous Flowers](#).



**IF YOU'D LIKE TO CONTINUE
LEARNING AND IMPROVING
YOUR PHOTOGRAPHY PLEASE
VISIT PHOTZY.COM**
