

Case Study #10

PHOTOGRAPHING FABULOUS FLOWERS

You've heard the expression, "seize the moment." Well, for photographers it is all about seizing the light, especially when you are shooting outdoors. You need to become attuned to the light, and when and how it will work for your subject, to get amazing flower photos.

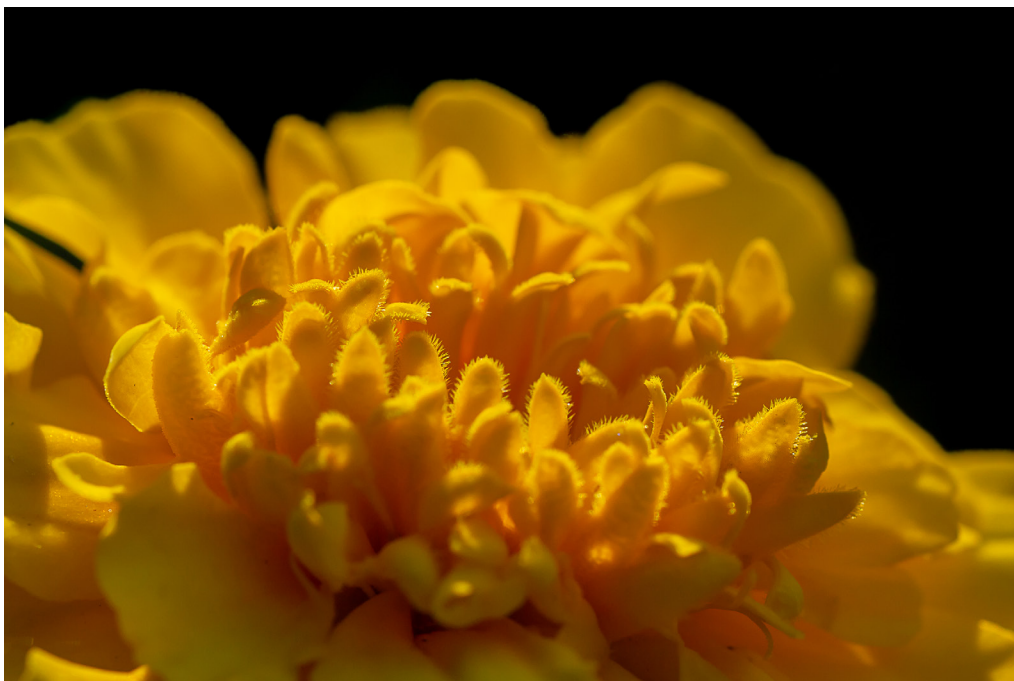
This image of a marigold is an example of how being in the right place at the right time can allow you to take the advantage of the best light available. The image was shot at ISO 200, with a shutter speed of 1/250th of a second and f/14 with a macro lens. The camera was hand-held but supported on the edge of a garden box.

The photograph was taken on a summer evening. The sun was shining on the marigold from a low angle, behind and to the right of the flower. The

background was in shade and, as a result, it came out black due to underexposure. This suited the final photo well as the background serves to showcase the subject nicely without providing distractions.

If I were to ask you what feeling this flower photo conveys, you might say "warmth." The warmth has a lot to do not just with the color of the subject but the quality of light. As mentioned in the guide, evening light has the special ability to convey warmth. This has to do with the angle of the sun in relation to the atmosphere. The atmosphere acts as a giant diffuser and the result is softer, redder light.

For comparison, look at this marigold that was shot during mid-morning in a shaded area of the garden:



Photograph by Leanne Cleaveley



Photograph by Leanne Cleaveley

This image has a completely different “feel” to it. It doesn’t give the sense of warmth that the first image does. Despite the orange of the marigold being a ‘warm’ color, the absence of red (and presence of a blue hue) in the shaded light make this photo feel cool in comparison.

The cooler light temperature for this second image was okay, as the message I was trying to communicate in that photograph was more about the freshness of the flower and less about warmth.

It is no coincidence that I was wandering the garden in the evening when I shot the first image. I often plan my “flower walks” around the times of day that I think will lend themselves to better flower photographs. I look for subjects and textures that might be better enhanced by backlight.

The result of the light that evening allowed for illumination of the tiny hairs on the inner petals, enhancing the marigold’s texture. The gently filtered light allowed for soft shadows on the petals, adding depth to the image without

creating the underexposed shadows that can occur in full sun shots during the day.

One other thing that you might want to consider is your white balance. I recommend you don’t get too bent out of shape over it for a couple of reasons. The first reason is that if you are shooting in RAW, which I always recommend, then you can make alterations to your white balance in your editing program later.

The second reason I recommend you don’t worry too much about white balance is that white balance settings are designed to filter out color hues. They are not perfect, and sometimes you may even want to keep the color hue if it works for your photo. If I had allowed my camera to correct the color hue in the second image, I might have even lost the effect I was trying to achieve with the warm tones.

Knowing how light’s qualities will affect your photographs is the first step. Knowing when to catch that light you need is the next step. Once you have figured out those two things, you just need to get out there and “seize the light.”