

## Case Study #08

# PHOTOGRAPHING FABULOUS FLOWERS

Shooting 'in the field' offers flower photographers the opportunity to capture images of their subject in context. It also creates unique opportunities with regards to light and setting that are difficult and sometimes even impossible to replicate in a studio.

Capturing flower images outdoors has its own set of challenges, but if you head out prepared, with your eyes open to different possibilities, the rewards can far outweigh any trials you may face.

If you look at the image below, it becomes apparent very quickly that this photo was captured outdoors in the flower's natural environment. Let's take a closer look at what features set this photo apart from a studio shot.

This image was captured in a wooded area about midday on a bright summer day. It was shot at ISO 200, with an f-stop of 8 and a shutter speed of 1/250<sup>th</sup> of a second using a macro lens. The speed would have allowed for hand-held, but a very narrow depth of field made it necessary to use a tripod for this shot to ensure that the focus point was true.

My initial shot, seen as the image on the next page, which was hand-held, demonstrates why the use of a tripod is very helpful when using a macro lens and shooting at a wide aperture. The point of focus is too far away and only the back petals of the yellow flower are sharp.



Photograph by Leanne Cleaveley



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The other thing that a tripod forces you to do is take your time in setting up your shot. Often, when using a tripod, I will pay more attention to where things are in my photograph than I do shooting hand-held. My final shot – the image on the previous page – shows far more attention to the placement of all the elements in my image than the first image does.

Many photographers will opt to travel light, but they risk missing a great capture by shunning a tripod. I have deleted flower photos from an entire shoot because I couldn't quite get the photo sharp enough while hand-holding my camera.

In the first image, the presence of other flowers, at various stages of budding or going to seed, place the main subject flower in context. These elements don't grab the viewer's attention initially but are noticed after seeing the yellow flower. They are perfect supporting elements as they tell the viewer that this flower was not alone but one of many found in this clearing.

Context is usually a missing element in studio flower images, unless you are shooting flowers in a bouquet or building a setting with other materials. In the field, context becomes a very strong element in your composition.

Dappled light filtering through nearby vegetation and cedar trees allowed a bright spot of light to hit the subject flower, leaving the background and other vegetation in low light. This pop of light and color is what drew me to this flower at first.

Dappled light can be very useful to flower photographers, creating 'spotlights' which allow for more interesting, and even moody, shots. This type of light also means you can shoot at midday. You do need to be wary of blowouts or underexposed areas because of the wide variance of light, but the strong contrasts can look quite dramatic as well.

The filtered light from the vegetation also created a subtle bokeh effect in brighter spots in the background, which is a deep mossy green. Again, these are features that cannot be replicated in a studio.

Finally, there is something very soothing about strolling through nature with your camera. The presence of the camera makes you notice things you might not notice on an ordinary walk. Whether your "field" is a meadow of wildflowers, a backyard garden, or dimly lit woods, get out into it and find some flowers to photograph.