

Photographing Orchids by Cathy Loftfield

It is astonishing to think that photography has only been around for about 160 years. In this time things have moved at an astounding rate. From the first black and white plate cameras to the mass produced Box Brownie using film, then the 35MM film camera on to color and now into the digital age. The diversity of equipment available today and quality of imagery that it produces could only have dreamed about back in the 1830s and 1840s when photography was born.

If you were wondering when the digital age of cameras began, it was in 1991. The first DSLR (digital single lens reflex) was produced by Kodak and named the DCS. It was built around a Nikon body using standard Nikon lenses. It was essentially a 35MM film camera with the film housing replaced with a digital sensor and associated electronics.

Today we are going to center our attention on digital cameras (point and shoot) cameras and DSLR (digital single lens reflex) cameras.

Digital (Point and Shoot): Often termed picture or subject modes. With these modes all you do is point and shoot, the camera does everything automatically. On most digital cameras the different shooting modes, whether represented on a dial or on a touch screen, include the following: portrait, the icon is a picture of a girl; landscape, icon is a mountain; close-ups, icon is a flower; moving subjects, icon is a man moving.

Photo Tips using Digital (Point and Shoot) Cameras for close-up and still life pictures:

- Use a simple background, as it will make the flower, etc. stand out better.
- Disable/turn off flash. To disable the flash most cameras have a lightning bolt that represents flash and is located either on the dial, a button on the side of the camera, or on the touch screen. The reason for disabling the flash is that the details in the image will get burned out using a flash. Additionally, using a flash creates harsh shadows.
- Focus on the subject. Press the button half-way down and notice where you are focusing usually, a green or red light highlights where you have focused. Also, if you are close to the subject and the bottom of the LCD screen looks dark, step back from the subject and refocus. See if this improves the image. Then press the button to take the picture.
- Using a tripod. Under low light, when camera shake is likely to occur, hold the camera steady or use a tripod.
- Zoom lens. If you have a zoom lens, use the telephoto to make the subject look larger.
- Use the Self Timer. To set the timer, press the menu button, select self-timer, press set and select 10 or two seconds, press set again.

Digital SLR Cameras (DSLR) incorporates the qualities of a film 35mm SLR (single lens reflex) and a digital camera. Film SLR and digital SLR cameras allow you to change lenses and accessories. Besides having the picture or subject modes as noted at Digital (point and shoot) cameras on page 1, there are also the Core Four exposure modes that include the following: Program, aperture priority, shutter priority, and manual. These are often termed creative modes, as they allow the user varying degrees of control over the exposure. Additionally, the ISO (image sensor's sensitivity to light) can be set to suit the ambient light level. Exposure compensation can be set for dark or bright backgrounds.

On the digital SLR cameras the modes are represented on a dial usually at the top of the camera: **P** for Program mode, **AV** mode to set the aperture (changing the depth of field), **TV** mode to set the shutter speed, and **M** for manual mode (set both aperture and shutter speed).

Photo tips using a Digital SLR camera for close-up/still life pictures:

Use a simple background. Use a tripod. Choose AV mode for exposure and set the aperture to f/11 – f/13 (for greater depth of field set the aperture to f/16 - f/22. Focus on the subject using manual or autofocus. Press the camera button half-way, when focus is achieved the dot(s) inside the AF point achieving focus lights briefly in red and the confirmation light in the viewfinder will also light. Press the button all the way down to take the picture.

Another suggestion for taking close-up/still-life pictures to avoid camera shake, use a tripod, turn the self- timer on and choose AV setting aperture to f/11 – f/13 or for greater depth of field set the aperture to f/16 - f/22. Focus on the subject using either manual or autofocus. Press the camera button halfway, when focus is achieved the dot inside the AF point achieving focus lights briefly in red and the confirmation light in the viewfinder will also light. Press the button all the way down to take the picture. This procedure will take about 2 – 15 seconds.

When you do not have control over the lighting and background, you can reduce the annoying background to a soft focus blur or eliminate it entirely by exposing the shot for a shallow depth of field. Choose AV, setting aperture to f/5.6 or smaller to restrict depth of field and bring sharpness to your subject while softening the background. (Use a tripod and self-timer).

Still Life/Close-up: Composing, Focusing, and Lighting Tips

When framing or composing a picture/image the following information can be helpful. Look for good placement of the main subject. Shooting at an angle really matters in photo composition to capture a more dynamic image. Placing odd numbers, such as one, three or five items in our case orchids makes a nice design. A way to create more impact is to place the main subject on a diagonal, so that the viewer's eyes travel into the image. Use the law of unequal

thirds to help balance the image. Keep it simple, with one clear and dominant subject. The main subject must almost always be sharp for the image to be of use. Usually, the main subject should be off center. If possible, keep the lighting appropriate for the subject.

The Advantages of Digital Cameras:

- The ability to see an image within seconds of the shutter being pressed, greatly increasing confidence and creativity.
- The ability to make enhancements to the image/picture by making alterations to exposure, color, and contrast with software such as Photoshop, Photoshop Elements, and other application software that allow one to enhance the picture/image.
- The option to remove distracting elements from a picture/image, blur a busy background, crop or resize the picture, enhance the picture by correcting the color by improving the tonal range, retouch flaws.

The Next Step

- After the picture(s) are taken, the image information is transferred to a memory card. If you have software application such as **Photoshop or Photoshop Elements** that gives one the opportunity to crop, enhance and sharpen the image this would be great. You can transfer your photos from the memory card to your computer and begin processing your pictures. Next, see Printing Your Pictures below.
- If you do not have image enhancing software, there is a free software program called Picasa that you can download from the internet. Go to the Internet and type in **Picasa.com** in your browser, the webpage will come up and you can download the program. The Picasa software allows you to crop, auto contrast, auto color, retouch, and many more enhancements. The program is easy to learn.
- If you do not want to use image enhancing software, your next choice is to take your memory card to places/locations and try the suggestions noted below to have your pictures printed. Noted in the next paragraph are names of places where you can get your pictures printed.

Printing your pictures:

There are many places/locations where you can print your pictures that include the following: You can bring the memory card to CVS Pharmacy, Walgreens, Wal-Mart, Costco to name a few. These companies have a computer where you can insert your memory card into the applicable slot and proceed to crop, enhance, add a border and choose the size of your print. You have the choice of printing the picture(s) at that time or have the store print them for you.

Additionally, if you need help, the store's employees can show you how to use the computer and offer suggestions. **Additionally, you can always use your own printer; however, you need to buy some photo paper.**

If you have enhanced your pictures and want to have them printed you can burn pictures onto a CD and take the CD to companies noted above and print them yourself or have the store print them.

If you decide to use an **Internet Company** such as **Shutterfly.com**, go to the website, open an account and upload your pictures. You can decide the size and number of pictures you want and pay through their website.

Another company located in Las Vegas is **Cashman ProPhoto Lab**. Their website is cashmanprophoto.com their phone # 702 693-6822, if you need help. You can upload your pictures on their website. You can decide the size and number of pictures you want and pay through their website or go to their offices and pick up and pay for your pictures.