

With spring on the horizon in some parts of the world, you may be thinking about photographing some beautiful wildflowers soon. So, here are 8 tips to get you started:

1. Use a tripod

Using a tripod will help you get sharper photos by ensuring your camera doesn't move. But, the tripod helps in another way too: it forces you to be more careful about your composition.

When you handhold your camera, there's a tendency to just snap away, but when you add the tripod, you'll spend more time thinking about your composition and ensuring your camera is in a very precise position.

2. Wait for an overcast or cloudy day

Direct sunlight will cast harsh shadows and create bright highlights on wildflowers, causing a disaster for exposure.

So, the best time to photograph wildflowers is on an overcast day, because the clouds act as the perfect light diffuser: creating the most perfectly balanced light you can get.

If you can't wait for an overcast day, cloudy days are good too: just wait for a cloud to cover the sun before taking your shot.

Flash photography is possible but not really recommended for close-up work unless you're an expert and have some sophisticated lighting, like ring-flash.

If you need to flatten a high contrast subject, consider bouncing some light back into the shadows. This could be done with just a large white card, or some foil or a quality reflector. I noticed in Henry's recently that they sell a small set of reflectors for under \$10.

Consider the White Balance - Auto WB may be fine, but it may be better with a 'Shade' or 'Cloudy' setting, or even in manual.

3. Position your camera's sensor so it's parallel to the most important plane of the flower

With every photo, you only get one geometrical plane of complete sharpness. So, to maximize sharpness in your wildflower photos, make sure your sensor is parallel to the flower's most important plane, and carefully focus your lens on this plane.

4. Use a shutter speed of 1/200 or faster

The most annoying problem you'll face when photographing wildflowers is battling the wind. So, to help freeze the action of wildflowers (which never seem to sit completely still!), use a fast shutter of at least 1/200 sec. You may need to increase your ISO to 200 or 400 to get your shutter speed this high but don't go past that. (Check out the "Exposure Triangle" on the [Workshop](#) page if you're unsure of exposures). Consider the use of something to act as a 'wind-break'.

5. Find a flower with a good background

When photographing wildflowers, it's easy to focus all your attention on the beautiful flowers and forget about the background. But, a good background will help your image by drawing more attention to your subject. So, take the time to find a flower with a good background: one that's far away (to help get it out of focus), contrasts well with the flower, and has no distracting elements. With a wide aperture, you'll be surprised at how blurred out the background can be.

6. Find a flower that's in good shape

Closely inspect each flower before photographing it, to ensure it's not missing petals or has poor colour. Some individual flowers of the same species will be more saturated in color than other individuals, so take some time to find that "perfect flower."

7. Use a telephoto lens with a short minimum focus distance

A long lens will help you isolate a sharp flower against an out-of-focus background. But, make sure you use one with a short minimum focus distance (5 ft or less), to ensure you can fill the frame with the flower. You can use an extension tube to make your lens focus even closer for the smaller flowers. Many 'long-telephoto zoom lenses' (like 70-200mm) will force you to be about 6 to 10 feet away from the subject - you don't want that.

8. Use the RGB histogram to check exposure, NOT just the LCD preview

When you're outside, images on your camera's LCD will appear much brighter than they actually are. So, to ensure you have a good exposure, rely on the RGB histogram. The histogram is a whole other topic by itself, but the basic idea is to use the histogram to ensure you're not overexposing any of the colour channels in your photo. Check out [Histogram information on the Workshop page](#).

Most of the above advice can apply to the smaller 'point and shoot' camera just as well as to a large DSLR. Check your camera's manual.

Remember to leave no trace...

When photographing wildflowers (or anything in nature), it's also important to leave no trace. That means, be careful not to step on the flowers, or disturb the ground around them (many flowers depend on the soil structure around them). And, it may be tempting to attach some kind of clip to flowers to keep from swaying in the wind, but please avoid this because it could potentially kill the flower.

So, enjoy the wildflowers, take lots of photos, but leave them just as you found them, so they can be enjoyed by the next person (or butterfly, eh?) too :)