

INTRODUCTION
Photographic Workshop – Wild Ones – Sugar Grove Nature Center

Plants have an innate beauty, with striking to subtle contrasts of texture, form, and color, and they long have been favorite subjects of photographers. Plant photographs are made for a variety of reasons.

- Snapshots to later help recall pleasant moments and places
- To record the occurrence of plants in particular locations or habitats
- To use for future identifications
- To communicate certain information about the subject to the viewer
- As an art medium through which impressions are passed on to the viewer
- Searching for that elusive, rare species and “capturing” it as an image

Imagine for a moment that you are in the middle of a prairie in June. The day is warm, the wind is brisk, the sun is shining in a clear blue sky, birds are singing, and the prairie is alive with colorful wildflowers and fascinating insects. Taken in by the whole thing, you hold a camera to your eye and press the shutter. When you later view the photo, you are disappointed because it did not capture the prairie as you remember it. What happened?

You have just learned that there is a fundamental difference between what the eye sees and what the camera records. A photograph is two-dimensional and is arbitrarily framed by four straight lines. It will not include what your peripheral vision saw, the whole scene in perfect focus, or what your other senses perceived. It will not emphasize any of the aspects that fascinated you and will suppress none that you ignored.

By learning how to visualize a picture while looking through the viewfinder, a photographer can select the camera position, kind of lens or zoom setting, and camera settings that will produce a photograph that conveys the photographer’s impression to the viewer.

Successful images display the visual information desired by the photographer clearly and succinctly. Serious photographers find that, while ‘good photographs’ can come about by accident, they happen more consistently when they know how to manipulate equipment and

situations. The beginner has to make numerous cautious, deliberate decisions, but the notions of composing and making camera settings largely become automatic as one gains experience by taking many pictures, analyzing them, and comparing them to photographs in books, magazines, and on the web.

Much of the information in these handouts is from: Robertson, Kenneth R. 1980. *Observing, Photographing, and Collecting Plants*. Illinois Natural History Survey Circular No. 55. [Available online at <http://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/item/99896>]

GENERAL EXERCISES:

1. Take both landscape shots and plant portraits in vertical and horizontal format.
2. Stand on a ladder, stairs, or other elevated structure and take photos showing a scene.
3. Take landscape shots and plant portraits from close to the ground.
4. Take photos on a cloudy day and after a storm.
5. Continue taking photo during the late fall and winter!

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