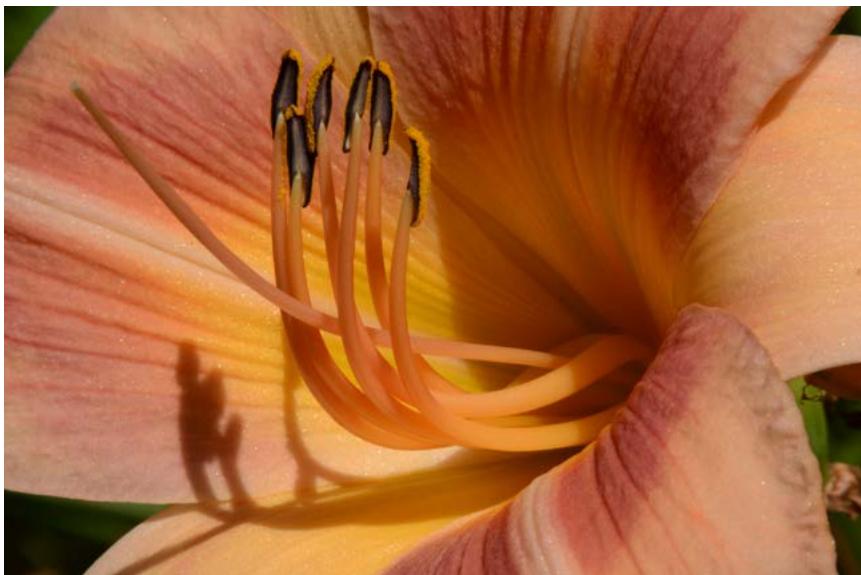


# The "Art" of Daylily Photography

by Jerry Gantar

With another daylily season just weeks away this seems like a perfect time to share some helpful tips and techniques for photographing daylilies. We'll discuss the best times for taking photographs in natural light, depth of field, composition, benefits of using a tripod, weather, and make a brief visit to close-up photography. My own photographs (good ones and not so good) will be used to illustrate specific points covered here.

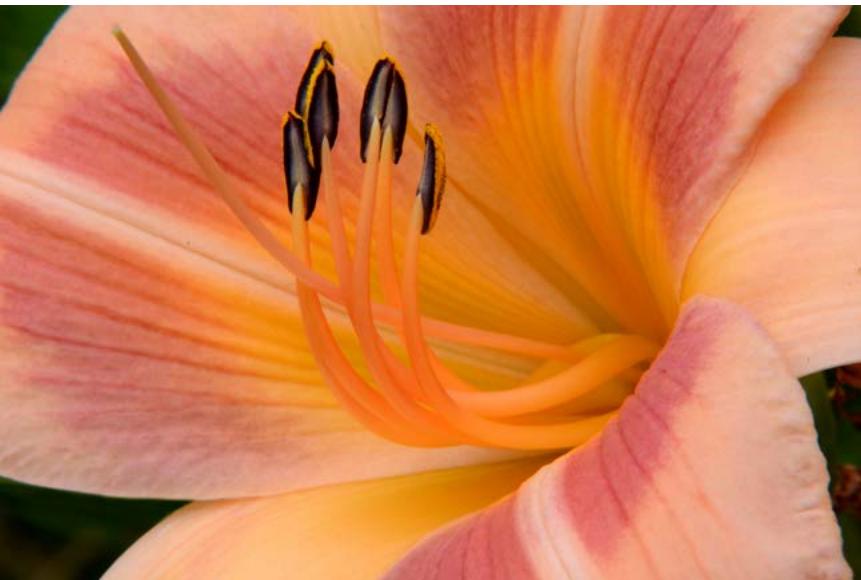
**Natural Light:** Although natural light is wonderful for flower photography, it's best to avoid taking photos in the middle of a bright sunny day. The result is often unflattering images with harsh contrast and dark shadows that can overwhelm a flower's delicate features.



*Photo of H. 'Real Wind' taken in direct sunlight.  
Note the harsh contrast and dark shadowy areas.*

As a general rule, to capture flattering images of daylilies, it's better to photograph them on hazy or overcast days when daylight is more diffused. Look at these two photographs. Note the strong contrast in the photo of Hemerocallis 'Real Wind' taken in direct sunlight; transitions between lighter and darker areas are abrupt and not pleasing to the eye. When the same daylily was photographed in diffused light, colors appear more saturated. Also, there's no harsh contrast, and transitions between light and dark areas are very gradual.

Conditions early and late in the day, when the sun is lower in the sky, are also ideal for daylily photography. That's when the light is softer and more directional. In early morning, when flowers usually look their best, natural light is warmer. Towards late afternoon the quality of light tends to be cooler which can give photographs a slightly bluish cast.



*Photograph of same flower taken just an hour earlier in diffused light.*

**Depth of Field:** When your camera focuses on a specific point, there's an area in front and behind that point which will appear in sharp focus. This in-focus area, running from front to back, is referred to as "depth of field". It determines how much of your subject will appear in relatively sharp focus.

With many cameras, it's possible to increase or decrease depth of field by adjusting the aperture on the camera lens. Shooting with a lens aperture set at higher f-stop numbers like f/16, f/22 or f/32 provides more depth of field, resulting in sharper overall images. Conversely shooting at apertures of f/8 or less reduces depth of field so that parts of a daylily won't be as sharp.

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Sometimes you may want to use a shallower depth of field (lower lens f-stop number) to intentionally soften or blur the background. In such cases, experiment with different f-stops to determine which one gives you the best result. In this example *H. 'Elaine Williams'* was photographed using four different f-stops. Look closely at each image. Which do you prefer? This illustrates tradeoffs you sometimes have to make – do you want to soften the background, or is it more important to keep the subject as sharp as possible.



Aperture = f/22, exposure 1/15 sec



Aperture = f/11, exposure 1/60 sec



Aperture = f/8, exposure 1/125 sec



Aperture = f/5.6, exposure 1/320 sec

The difference in these four photographs is the lens aperture – f/22 offers the greatest depth of field and sharpest overall image; f/5.6 produces the shallowest depth of field and least sharp of the four images. Compare the backgrounds; which is least distracting? Also look closely at the rain drops on the petals of the top flower. They are sharpest in the first photograph (f/22) and less sharp in the last photograph (f/5.6).

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**Composition:** We're drawn to daylilies because they are beautiful and interesting flowers. To capture their special qualities in your photographs, experiment with different camera positions to find the best and most pleasing compositions. Instead of looking straight down at a blossom, try positioning your camera off to one side to create the illusion of depth and a more visually appealing image. When examining a flower, look for specific visual elements, shapes, or patterns that you may want to emphasize when composing your photograph. Also, look for backgrounds that complement the color of the daylily.



*This composition emphasizes the gracefully curved and twisting petals of 'Dublin Elaine'. Different camera angles were considered before choosing this one. The dark background doesn't compete with the main subject.*



*After positioning my camera at the same height as 'Chicago Atlas', I focused on the intricate patterns of veins on the flower petals. The blurred green background contrasted nicely with the colors of the flower.*



*Don't be reluctant to try something different. For this composition my camera lens was pointed towards the back of 'Ruffled Apricot'. Late afternoon light striking the front of the flower accentuated veins in the petals.*



*I was drawn to the soft pleasing colors in the petals of 'Etched In Gold'. This composition was chosen because it has a 3-dimensional quality with the flower appearing to float above the soft dark green background.*

As illustrated in the examples above, consider different camera angles and choose compositions that best showcase appealing features of daylilies, such as their gracefully curved petals, intricate patterns of veins, beautiful ruffles, or subtle variations in color. Sometimes it may be necessary to get down on your knees with the camera positioned at the same height as the flower. If you don't mind getting a little dirty, try lying on the ground, shooting up at the flower with the sky or blurred distant tree tops as a background. Just remember, with your camera pointed up towards the sky, you may need to increase exposure time – a bright sky can fool most cameras, resulting in darker, underexposed images.

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With daylily photography, it's especially important to consider the background. Many of my early photographs (like the example on the left) had cluttered backgrounds that distracted the viewer. You'll want daylilies appearing in your photographs to standout so they are the center of attention. One technique for avoiding unwanted background clutter is to change camera angles. For example, consider taking some photographs looking up at the flowers (as in the second example below) rather than looking down into the plant where more of a busy background may be visible. How you treat the background can make the difference between a mediocre image and a really good photograph.



*This could have been a nice photograph of 'Ruffled Apricot' if the background wasn't so cluttered. Although it may have helped tidying up around the plant, changing the camera angle is a better option.*



*Here different camera angles were considered to eliminate background clutter. To solve the problem I ended up photographing 'Yellow Pinwheel' with my camera pointed up at the gray sky.*

Get into the habit of looking for ways of eliminating distracting background elements. For example, before photographing daylilies growing in our garden, I take time to clean up around the plant; removing dead or yellowing foliage and deadheading spent blooms. When composing photographs, check for bright areas (hot spots) in the background that can distract viewers. Another suggestion: when using a zoom lens, try zooming out to narrow the camera's field of view. This technique is often effective for removing hot spots and other distracting background objects. In the example below, unwanted background features were eliminated by slightly adjusting the camera angle and changing my zoom lens to a longer telephoto setting.



*While photographing 'Hudson Valley', I noticed hot spots at the top caused by patches of white sky. Other unwanted objects appeared along the bottom of the frame.*



*To clean-up the distracting background, I altered the camera angle slightly and adjusted my zoom lens from 62 mm to 105 mm. This blurred the background and narrowed the field of view.*

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Another option for dealing with distracting backgrounds is to eliminate them all-together. Move closer to your subject until all or most of the background falls outside the frame. Although the tips of flower petals may be cropped from the field of view, I don't find that objectionable if the end result is a more pleasing image. Some may disagree, but don't feel that it's always necessary to include all of a flower in your photographs.

Another tip: While scouting gardens for possible subjects, look around for pairs of daylily blooms that are almost mirror images of each other. Before photographing them, you may want to tilt your camera just a little so one bloom is slightly higher than the other. It's usually a good idea to take several exposures using different camera angles and aperture settings; then select the best one.



*H. 'Song of Deliverance'*

*The photograph was taken mid-morning on a cloudy day. The colorful flowers were hovering just above the foliage so I decided to come in close to eliminate distracting leaves in the background.*



*H. 'Elaine Williams'*

*After it stopped raining, this tightly-cropped image was taken just before the sun broke through the clouds. Because the background was in shadow, it came out much darker and didn't compete with the main subject.*



*This colorful pair of 'Love Fest' blooms was photographed several times from slightly different camera angles. On the left is the first image; a later (and better) composition of the same flowers appears on the right. Don't be satisfied with your initial composition; use that as a starting point and try different camera positions.*

*The photo on the right was taken using an f-stop of f/16. This sufficiently blurred the background, while still providing enough depth of field to keep the flowers in sharp focus.*

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One additional comment regarding composition: While it's true that insects can create unsightly blemishes on flowers, they also make for interesting and colorful subjects. Look for opportunities to incorporate them into your daylily photographs. The best time to do this is earlier in the day. Tiny frogs like the one pictured below are also frequent garden visitors. You might find one hiding in the throat of your favorite daylily. When shooting insects and other critters, focus your camera lens on their eyes and use f-stops in the f/16 to f/32 range to increase depth of field so more of the subject will appear in relatively sharp focus. If an insect is actively moving around, take several shots while maintaining focus on the insect; if you're lucky the subject may not be blurred in all of the photos.



*This grasshopper posed on 'Etched in Gold' long enough to take a number of photographs from different angles. To ensure maximum depth of field, f-stops in the f/16 to f/32 range were used.*



*Found this shy tree frog resting inside the throat of 'Yellow Pinwheel'. Early morning is the ideal time to capture images like this. For best results, mount your camera on a tripod to avoid camera shake.*

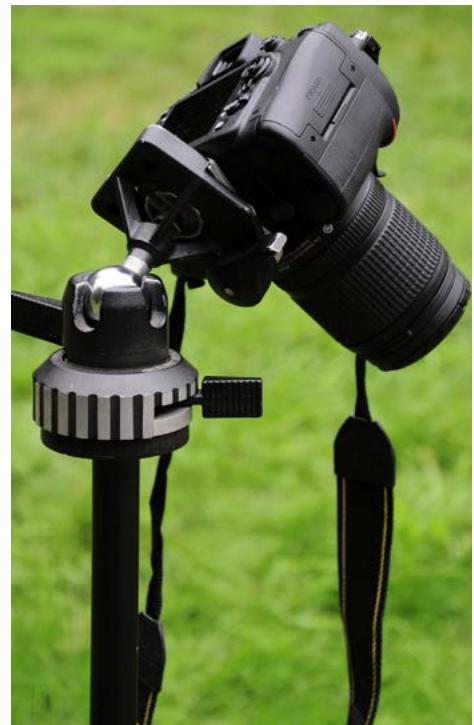
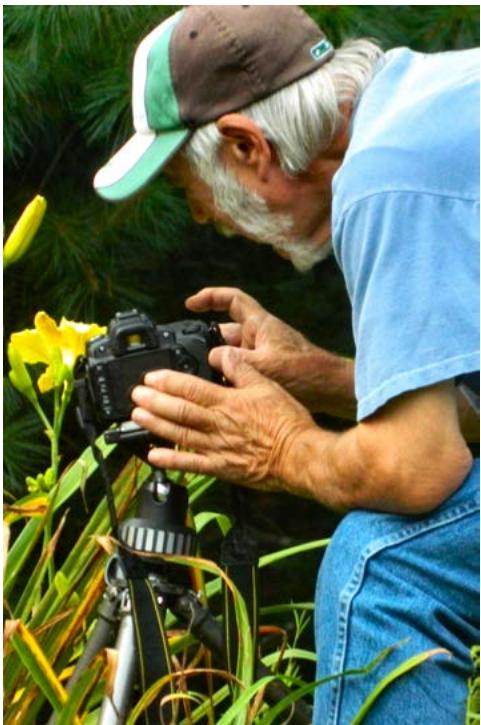


*"Bee" ready for the unexpected. While taking photos of 'Carmine Elizabeth', this tiny bee landed on the flower. Because it was actively harvesting pollen, I fired off several quick shots, hoping the bee wouldn't appear blurred in every image. For maximum depth of field the lens aperture was set for f/32 with a +4 close-up filter attached to the front of the camera lens.*

**Benefits of a Tripod:** When shooting at higher f-stops (smaller lens apertures) the camera requires more time to make proper exposures; the higher the f-stop number, the longer the exposure. To avoid camera shake and blurred images, especially when taking longer exposures, it's best to have your camera mounted on a sturdy tripod. A tripod also helps when composing photographs. It frees you up, giving you time to experiment with different compositions and carefully focus on the main subject.

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A tripod used in combination with a ball joint head makes it much easier to change camera angles and carefully frame your subject. With a good ball joint head like the one pictured below, fine adjustments can be made before locking the camera in place. If there's a slight breeze, you can always wait for a lull before taking the photograph.



*Use of a tripod and ball joint head provides greater stability and control when composing and framing subjects.*

If you haven't used a tripod before, consider purchasing one. The better-made tripods can be a bit pricy, but they're worth the investment (I've had the same one for more than 35 years).

One thing you should be aware of when using a tripod: if your camera has a feature called image stabilization (or vibration reduction), you may want to turn it off before taking photographs. Depending on the make of camera and lens, images taken with some tripod-mounted cameras may actually be sharper when image stabilization is off. Just remember to turn it back on should you decide to hand-hold your camera.

**Weather:** Don't let wet weather keep you indoors. I look forward to photographing daylilies after it's rained. Once a storm passes, there's often very little wind and the lighting is even and soft – ideal conditions for flower photography. I've gotten some of my best and most interesting daylily photographs just after it rained.



*These photos of 'Classic Caper' and 'Real Wind' were taken shortly after it rained.*

*The light was diffused and there was hardly any breeze to blur rain drops appearing on the flowers.*

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Photographing tiny water droplets clinging to daylily blooms can result in very appealing and interesting images. When taking these kinds of photographs, take time to carefully position your camera, making sure that several rain drops are in sharp focus. Use a high f-stop number (small lens aperture) with camera firmly mounted on a tripod. A high f-stop number provides sufficient depth of field to show enough detail on the tiny rain drops.

**Close-Up Photography:** If you own an SLR and want to take close-up images of daylilies, you have two options – use a macro lens or purchase a set of relatively inexpensive close-up filters (also called magnification filters). These threaded filters come in three magnifications (+1, +2, and +4) and easily screw onto the front of your camera lens, allowing you to use it for macro photography. For extreme close-ups you can stack two or all three of these filters for greater magnification. The only possible downside to using close-up filters is that they may reduce image sharpness somewhat – although I haven't found that to be an issue with my photographs.



A +4 magnification filter was used for these three close-ups of '*Carmine Elizabeth*'.

The first two images were taken at 9 am in diffused light; the one at the right was shot 2 hours later in direct sunlight, resulting in a photograph with higher contrast. To achieve maximum depth of field, the lens aperture was set to f/36 in the left photo; for the center photo an aperture of f/8 was used. Most of the flower in the first photo appears sharp. In the middle photo parts of the flower are blurred because of the shallower depth of field.

Conditions must be just right when taking close-up photos of daylilies. Wait for overcast days when it's very still outside. Also, precise focusing is critical for flower macro photography. Even the slightest lens adjustment has a significant effect on image sharpness because the depth of field that you're working with is so shallow. Decide what parts of the flower you want in sharpest focus; then slowly adjust your camera position to ensure they will appear as sharp as possible when the photograph is taken. This requires patience and can be a bit challenging, especially outdoors when even a slight breeze can blur the image. To help ensure success, shoot several close-ups of your subject; then choose the best one.

If you want to take daylily photography to a new level, close-up photography is a great way of achieving that goal. It opens up new opportunities to be creative, think outside the box, and produce unique eye-catching images. If interested, there are many excellent books and video tutorials covering this subject. Try googling "Close-Up Photography" and "Macro Photography" for links to additional information.

In closing, I hope these tips, examples, and recommendations are helpful. Daylily photography can be a very gratifying activity, allowing you to capture the beauty of your favorite daylilies and share those images with family, friends, and fellow daylily enthusiasts.