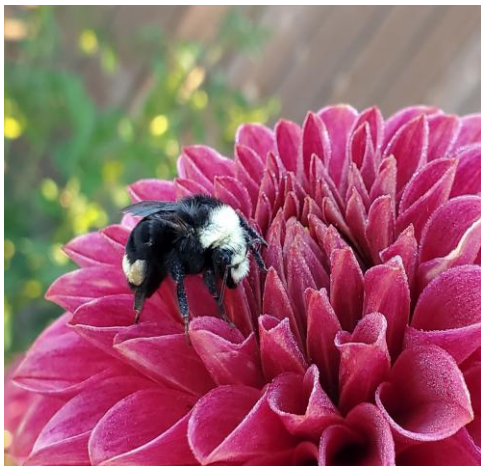


**Summary from ADS video “Dahlia Photography: Basic Tips”
watched at July 8, 2025 meeting and other information about
photographing dahlias:**

Choosing Your Subject

- The Perfect Bloom
 - Find Blooms That Are Show Ready
 - Avoid Blown Centers, Insect Damage, Faded Blooms
 - Make It More Interesting
 - Water Droplets
 - Bees, Frogs, Hummingbirds



Framing Your Subject

- Rule of Thirds
- Avoid Distracting Elements
- Change The Angle Of Approach
- Trying Getting Up Close And Personal
- You Can Always Crop Later
- Consider Relocating The Bloom (Assuming It Is Your Garden)

Rule of Thirds



Avoid Distracting Elements



Change The Angle of Approach



Lighting

- Timing Is Important

- Best Light Is from Sunrise to 10:00 am
 - “Golden Hour” One Hour After Sunrise
- Next Best Light Just Before Sunset
- Look For Days That Are Bright but Overcast
- Avoid Harsh Sunlight
 - Creates Distracting Shadows and Glare on Your Subject



Avoid Harsh Sunlight



Avoiding Movement

- Consider a Tripod
- Lock Your Elbows into Your Sides
- Avoid Windy Days

Photo Editing

- Most modern Smart Phones Have Powerful but Simple to Use Photo Editing Tools
- But Know the Rules If Entering In Contests

How To Photograph Dahlias

Lawrence Way – California Dahlia Society

I suspect that most people who want to learn how to photograph flowers would be pleased if they could make sharp, colorful images that were worthy of enlarging and hanging on the living room wall. The following remarks are addressed to novice and intermediate photographers with this and comparable ambitions.

1. Equipment: Necessary and/or Desirable.

- Single-lens reflex camera:
 - o For flower photography, SLRs are considerably better than point-and-shoot rangefinder cameras.
- Tripod:
 - o A tripod provides the only good way to prevent the motion blur that results from handheld attempts at stabilization. Leaning over the fence and shooting hand-held will rarely win a prize.
- Lens:
 - o The lens that comes with the camera should suffice; it should be able to take close-up photos. A macro lens might be helpful for some shots, but one can put off buying more lenses until later.
- Reflector:

- o A reflector can be very useful for filling harsh shadows. It is cheap and easy to use.

- Gardener's Knee Pads:

- o When photographing flowers still on the plant, one should be at or about the same height as the flower.

- Hoodman Loupe:

- o This makes it easier to see the screen when using Live View in strong sunlight.

- A plamp: (see later)

- Large piece of velvet cloth to serve as a backdrop

2. Planning the Photograph:

- Decide on the angle of the shot:

- o straight on, from above, at an angle, and so forth. How do you want to frame the subject: vertical or horizontal; up close or not; one flower or a cluster? And how much surrounding context do you want to include?

- Flower Position:

- o Experienced photographers prefer to offset the flower with respect to the center of the image, but this is a matter of taste and what the image will be used for.

- Distractions:

- o To the extent possible avoid including leaves with powdery mildew. It is most important to exclude patches of bright sky or other bright objects in the background! Even small visual distractions like this can ruin an otherwise fine photo. If it is impossible to exclude a distraction, try placing a black poster board (or better, a black velvet cloth) behind the plant as a shield.

3. Technical Aspects of Taking the Photo

- Learn About Your Camera: First of all, figure out how your camera works before attempting to take photos that you hope

would be worth keeping. Failure to follow this advice can cause enough disappointment that the camera may be set on the shelf unused for a time. This is difficult to do by yourself alone with just the instruction manual as a guide. Perhaps the best arrangement is to seek help from a knowledgeable family member or friend. If you can't work it out this way, there are many good courses offered in San Francisco and throughout the Bay Area. To find a suitable course enter "where can I learn how to use my new camera" into Google. Beginner's courses are given on the weekend and range from 3 to 6 hours. Both Nikon and Canon, the two major DSLR makers, conduct basic courses at regular intervals.

- Settings: Other than to insert a battery and memory card, you must learn the meaning and how to use the following: shutter speed, aperture, ISO, live view, focus, depth-of-field, and histogram. They all work together, however, and if confusing at the start, they will soon become obvious as you get shooting. For the most part you will want to take flower photos in "aperture preferred" mode at around f16 aperture; ISO 200-400; using "manual focus" and "live view."
- Motion: Flowers love to dance even in a mild breeze, and this is an ever-present nuisance. The best solution obviously is to shoot when the wind is calm, which in San Francisco means early morning. There is a small device (called a "plamp," or plant clamp) that can grasp and immobilize the flower stem. This may come in handy. Or you may want to cut the flower and take the photo indoors.
- Timing: In general, the best time to shoot is in the morning, from morning twilight to around 10:00 am. By then the breezes usually are too much to handle. The best light is bright with an overcast sky; the worst is direct sunlight, because the shadows are too dark (ie, contrast is too great). The worst time to shoot is between 10:30 am and 3:30 pm. If you get it, a little morning dew may add to the attractiveness. Some people lightly spray the flower in order to create this effect.

□ I have found it more difficult to work in the dell than in my own garden, where I can move around the plants with less trepidation and cut the flowers to photograph separate.

4. Processing the Image Eventually you will want to learn how to use Adobe Lightroom in order to crop the image; optimize brightness, contrast, and color saturation; and sharpen. Lightroom is relatively easy by comparison with Photoshop, and in my opinion, it does a better job on these basics. Once again, you should begin with formal instruction.

To capture stunning dahlia photos, focus on timing, lighting, and perspective. Opt for soft, diffused light, like during the golden hour (early morning or late afternoon), or on an overcast day. Explore different angles and close-ups to highlight the intricate details of the petals. Consider using a macro lens for detailed shots and experiment with shallow depth of field to isolate the flower.

Here's a more detailed breakdown:

1. Timing and Lighting:

Golden Hour:

Shoot during the "golden hour" (shortly after sunrise or before sunset) for soft, warm light that enhances colors and minimizes harsh shadows.

Overcast Days:

Overcast skies provide soft, diffused light that is ideal for capturing details and avoiding strong shadows.

Avoid Harsh Midday Sun:

Midday light can create unflattering shadows and wash out colors, so it's best to avoid shooting during this time.

Side Lighting:

Experiment with side lighting to bring out the texture and details of the petals.

Reflectors and Diffusers:

Carry a reflector to bounce light onto darker areas and a diffuser to soften harsh light when necessary, especially if shooting in bright sun.

2. Perspective and Composition:

Low Angles:

Shooting from a low angle can help isolate the flower from the background and create a more dramatic effect.

Close-Ups:

Dahlias are known for their intricate petal patterns, so macro lenses or telephoto lenses zoomed in can help capture these details.

Depth of Field:

Use a shallow depth of field (wide aperture) to blur the background and draw attention to the flower.

Unique Angles:

Experiment with different angles, such as shooting through other flowers or from a top-down perspective.

Fill the Frame:

Get close to your subject and fill the frame with the dahlia to emphasize its beauty and detail.

3. Camera Settings and Techniques:

Macro Lens:

If you have a macro lens, use it to capture the intricate details of the petals.

Aperture:

Experiment with different aperture settings to control the depth of field. A wide aperture (e.g., f/2.8 or f/4) creates a shallow depth of field, while a narrow aperture (e.g., f/16) creates a deeper depth of field.

Shutter Speed:

Use a faster shutter speed to freeze the flower's movement, especially when shooting handheld.

Tripod:

A tripod can be helpful when using narrow apertures and longer shutter speeds to prevent camera shake.

Background:

Pay attention to the background and ensure it complements the flower. A blurry background (shallow depth of field) can help isolate the subject.

4. Other Tips:

Clean your lens:

Ensure your lens is clean to avoid spots or dust affecting the quality of your photos.

Shoot in RAW format:

Shooting in RAW format allows for more flexibility in post-processing.

Shoot many photos:

Take a variety of shots, experiment with different angles and settings, and then choose your favorites.

Practice:

The more you practice, the better you will become at capturing stunning dahlia photos.

Photographing Dahlia Flowers

September 10, 2020 | [Techniques](#) | [0 Comments](#)

One of the highlights of late summer is photographing dahlia flowers. Typically the end of summer is a bit of a downtime for me photographically as the weather and foliage is not conducive to great photography, so, the dahlia bloom is a blast of color, shapes and textures that is a highlight of the summer. Oregon has several amazing dahlia farms who are also very welcoming to photographers. Unfortunately this year all of the festivals were cancelled, yet they still opened their fields to visitors.

I was fortunate enough to visit one of our local fields on a great weather day and right after they ran the sprinklers in the field which produced amazing water drops on all of the flowers! If you are interested in photographing dahlia flowers, here are a few tips that you should consider. And, check out my yearly workshop during dahlia season where I can help you realize your creative vision with these amazing flowers.



Go Early

You do want the best light possible when photographing dahlia flowers, and, you don't want to have to worry too much about all of the looney-loos, so, go as early in the day as you can. Right after sunrise is often times the best, but fields in your area might be open to the public. The goal is to get in and be able to work for a couple of hours before all of the flower aficionados descend on the fields with their iPhones and strollers. This year I arrived before the farm opened but the fields were accessible from the road so I occupied myself with the flowers alongside the road until they opened.



Environmental Conditions

Photographing dahlia flowers, or any flower, the environmental conditions can have a HUGE impact on your photographs. When there is bright sun overhead, you will experience a high contrast scene and lots of shadows. Each flower petal will create a shadow on the one below it. Not very attractive in my opinion. It is best to time your visit to those days that are overcast, even raining. The soft diffuse lighting will even out the light across the flower and let you bring out all the detail and color of each petal on the flower. If you do happen to be there when the sun is shining, you can use a light diffuser to help block the direct light and create a more pleasing effect on the flower. I keep a small 10" diffuser in my camera bag at all times as I never know when I might need to alter the light when I'm shooting flowers or macro shots. A [collapsible diffuser](#) will collapse (duh) into a much smaller size and are available in many different sizes. You can find these in many different sizes and shapes and they are relatively cheap.



Lens Choice

When photographing dahlia flowers, I often get asked “what lens do I use” or “can I still get good images when I don’t have a macro lens”. As to which lens, it depends 😊 Depends on what you have as well as what kinds of shots you want to come home with. And YES, you can get great images with “normal” lenses...you don’t need a macro lens. I do most often use a macro lens when photographing dahlia flowers. I have the Fujifilm XF60mm macro for my X-T3 as well as the GF120mm macro for my GFX. I find that these lenses are incredibly sharp and have a great focusing distance and work great for the types of photographs I want to create.

One of the biggest factors you need to consider when selecting a lens is the lens’ minimum focusing distance. With many lenses you can’t get too close to the subject and still be able to achieve sharp focus, sometimes 12-24” minimum. If you want to fill the frame with the flower, this minimum focusing distance may not be enough. The longer lens you use the further away from the subject you need to be. On a 100-400mm which would really zoom in on a flower, you need to be at least 3M away from the flower. At this distance you won’t be able to move around the flower and get the right composition as you’ll be limited by the field, paths, people, etc. Macro lenses on the other hand are designed to have closer focusing distances so you can be right on top of the flower and really fill the frame. Many macro lenses can only go to a 1:1 magnification, which means it will be life sized in the frame. If you

want to get even closer, you may need to buy a lens designed for higher magnification.

One less expensive option that can decrease your focusing distance and make a “normal” lens act more like a macro lens is using [extension tubes](#). These are hollow parts that fit between the camera and lens, moving the lens elements further away from the camera sensor, thereby increasing the magnification.

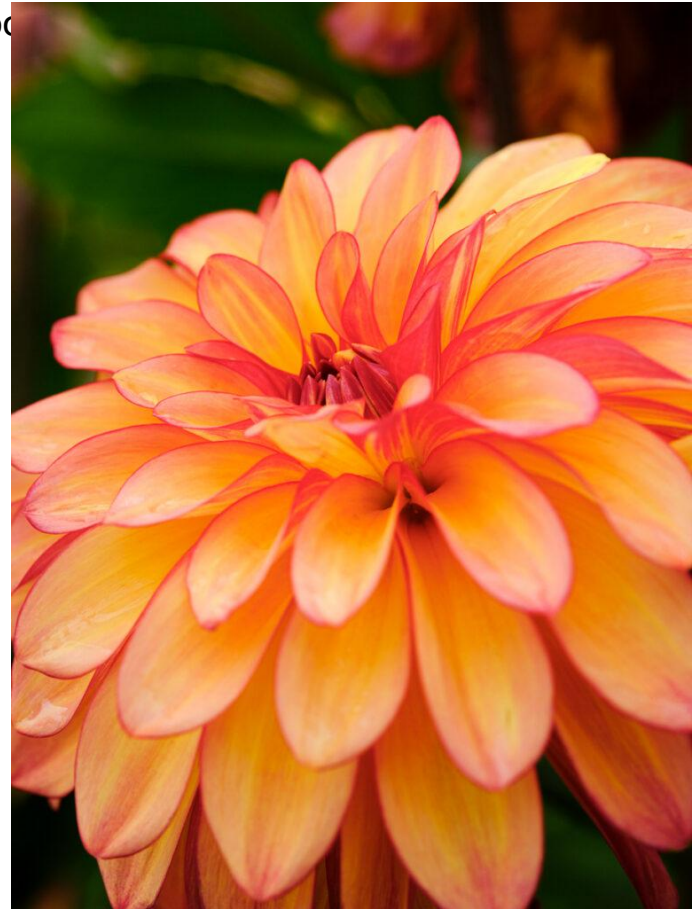


Depth of Field:

If you are using a macro lens while photographing dahlia flowers, you need to focus on the depth of field to make sure that you get all of the flower that you want in focus, in focus. When working very close to your subject, the depth of field is typically shallower at a given aperture. If you typically shoot at $f/8$ - $f/11$ when doing landscapes or other types of photography, you will find that when doing macro or close up work that $f/8$ is really shallow and you might not get all of the flower in focus. Hopefully you have a Depth of Field preview button or focus peaking highlights in your camera so you can see which parts of the image will be in focus and can make adjustments before you take the

shot. I often work at f/16-f/22 on my X-T3 and then work around f/29 on my GFX when I want all of the flower in focus.

Remember that you do NOT need to have all of the flower in focus if you don't want to. In some shots I do enjoy having the focus fall off towards the sides and back of the flower to give a more "dreamy" look to the flower and/or to focus the viewers attention to the area that I really want them to look. Remember, focus or out of focus will help direct the viewers eyes and its a subtle tool that can work.



Another thing to think about when you are photographing dahlia flowers is the background behind the flower. Too often we are fixated on the flower and getting just the right composition. Then, when we get home and review our images, we see unsightly stems, stalks, flowers or bright spots in the background which detracts from the beauty of the flower. As you are working in the field and lining up that perfect shot of a flower, pause and scan the background through the viewfinder to see if there are any distracting elements behind the flower.



In this shot, I wanted to highlight this one flower as I liked the colors and textures and the water drops. I was fixated on the flower and didn't pay attention to the background. As you can see, there are bright pink flowers in the background, partial flowers and stems and buds, which all detract from what I wanted to do, which was to isolate and focus on that one flower. Once I took the pictures, I paused and scanned the background and saw all the "noise" behind and around the flower and reshot the same flower with this result...



Notice that without all of the distractions behind the flower the eye is directed right on the flower and there is nothing to pull the eye away from what I want the center of attention to be. How did I do this you might ask? Simply by moving my tripod a very small amount I was able to better isolate the flower. Plus in post I did a small amount of cropping to remove some elements I couldn't do in my original

composition. You may want shots showing multiple flowers to help give a sense of scale or depth to the image and that's great! You're the artist and you can shoot it how you want. Just be very aware of what's in your frame and the "acceptable" amounts of focus in the frame.

Variety of shots

The cool thing about photographing dahlia flowers is that you can shoot them from so many different angles. Don't be afraid to experiment with different angles and perspectives, and at different apertures to achieve



You can include the whole flower in your shot

You can include just a small portion of the flower



You can even make great shots shooting the back of the flower!

Water Drops and Foliage

In my opinion, having water drops on the flowers adds a bit of extra visual interest to the image so when drops are present, I work to include them as much as I can in the photographs. Because we humans are very perceptive to in-focus and out-of-focus elements in an image, the water drops add a bit more complexity to an image as I want to keep all the drops as sharp as possible on most of the petals, even when my focus point is in the middle of the flower. My range of “acceptable sharpness” gets more critical and I need to typically increase my aperture to have more of the flower in focus, so that more of the drops are in focus.



And don't be shy about including greenery or foliage in your flower shots. Sometimes the leaves and buds can add some additional depth and visual interest to the shots. When I do choose to include them, I find examples where the leaves don't hide or detract from the main element of my image, instead they highlight and/or direct the eye towards the main area of subject in the image.



Framing

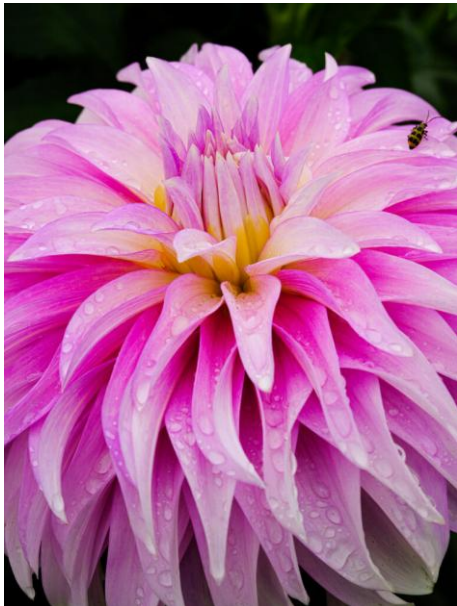
One last tip for photographing dahlia flowers, if you choose to not include the whole flower, be very deliberate about where and how the petals leave the edge of the frame. When you “cut off” leaves, make sure that it is consistent as possible on all sides of the frame. If you have petals leaving the frame on only one side, it may look like you just didn’t take a good photograph. However, if you have the petals leaving the frame on 3 or 4 sides of the photograph, then it looks deliberate and crafted.



In the above example (which I shot on purpose for this article) you can see how the petals are leaving the frame on the top side. This gives the feeling that I just wasn’t paying attention and didn’t capture the whole flower since that is what it seems I was trying to do.



In this example the petals are leaving the frame on the top and bottom of the frame. This gives the feeling of being deliberate and designed, not sloppy. If I had zoomed in closer petals would be leaving the frame on all 4 sides. There is no “rule” to this, just be very clear to your viewer what you are intending to do.



And in this final example, I oriented my tripod and camera to have petals leaving the frame on 3 sides of the image, leaving the top open so the image would “breathe” a little bit. AND, I also pay special attention to WHICH leaves are included and which are cut off and where they are cut off. Oftentimes its very small adjustments with the tripod to get this framed just right. The leaves that are fully included....I also left enough “space” between the end of the petal and the edge of

the frame, not wanting to crowd the end too much. Also, notice too how the shape of this flower, long drooping petals, really works best in a portrait orientation, not in a landscape orientation. Read the shape of the flower and decide which orientation would look best for the flower.

If you want to see a short video of my most recent trip to the dahlia fields and how I captured some of these images, check it out here: [My Video](#)

So there ya go, some quick tips for photographing dahlia flowers. If you have any questions or want more information don't hesitate to drop me a note or leave a comment below.

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