

Hey Bud! Can I Take Your Picture?

I love digital cameras! You can take hundreds of pictures without worrying about the cost of film. Later, you can just delete those pictures that are less than perfect.

A camera is a wonderful way of saving your garden memories, recording the beauty of the garden from season to season and from year to year, and adding more information to your garden journal. The pictures can be easily enlarged and are truly garden art, suitable for framing and hanging on a wall. You can plan what you will plant this coming year by studying last year's photos. With practice, your photos can approach professional quality. Here are some hints to get you started:

1. Great shots do not need an expensive camera. Wonderful shots can be made with less expensive cameras. Camera quality improves every year. However, it is very helpful to read evaluations from photography magazines and internet sites to learn the capabilities and limitations of the camera you wish to purchase. Extra batteries, a battery charger, and one or two electronic chips with plenty of picture storage are also important.

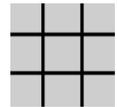
2. Use the strap. Whenever you pick up a camera, automatically use the camera wrist strap. Whenever I give a camera to one of my grandchildren, I emphasize and re-emphasize this habit. I cannot count the number of times that I could have lost or damaged my camera, if I did not have it connected to my wrist.

3. Read the manual. And re-read it. Learn the secrets of what your camera and lens can and cannot do. Go to the library and read a book or two about digital photography. Take a course or two from the camera store or in an adult education class. Then play and experiment with your camera.

4. Get down and dirty. Don't be afraid to get down on your knees, or even lower, to get a unique perspective of a flower bud or group of flowers. You can shoot with the sun shining through the petals and blue sky overhead. Or climb a ladder for those overhead shots. Read the camera manual to learn how close you can get to the plant, and still stay in focus. Close-up shots can be stunning. Use a black cloth as a backdrop to isolate an especially interesting plant. Some professionals shoot hundreds of photos to get those one or two truly outstanding shots.

5. Watch the sun. The best light for garden pictures is in early morning, late afternoon, an overcast day, or just before or after a rainstorm. Drops of rain or dew on a petal are stunning. Use a white card as a reflector to fill in shady areas of your picture. The bright light of mid-day sun tends to cause overexposed or washed-out pictures.

6. Look for a unique quality in your garden that will make an unusual yet beautiful picture. Move in. Move out. Eliminate power lines and distractions. Moving a few feet can result in a better photo. Frame your subject carefully. For the best effect, divide the height and width of the picture into thirds so that the picture is divided in your mind into nine equal parts. Shoot so that the main subject is away from center. Look for unusual patterns in your garden. Even weeds, seed pods, and dead, winter plants can be interesting. Pretend that you are 4 years old and then take a look. Everyone has the soul of an artist, just waiting to create the next masterpiece.



7. Play with the lens opening (aperture) and shutter speed. Increasing the lens opening will result in a well focused subject and slightly fuzzy background, while decreasing the lens opening will result in more sharpness throughout the picture. Play around with different settings and study their effect.

8. For crucial shots, buy and use a tripod. A tripod ensures that you get a good, crisp, non-blurred picture. Especially in low light conditions where the shutter is held open for a bit longer, a tripod with a remote shutter release will keep the camera steady during exposure.

9. Add a person, child, or pet to the picture. Your twenty pound tomato, 500 pound pumpkin, or prize winning petunia will look that much bigger and better with a human or animal in the shot.

10. FINALLY, IF YOU SEE A GOOD PICTURE, JUST SHOOT!!!

When I was in the Navy, I visited the botanical gardens in Singapore. A large butterfly landed on an orchid. I fiddled and fooled with the camera focus. Meanwhile, the butterfly flew away. I swore as only a sailor can swear. I kicked myself, and still cry when I think of that fluttering butterfly and that amazingly beautiful orchid.

