

GREAT NATURE PHOTOS

WAUBONSIE STATE PARK PHOTOGRAPHY HIKE ♦ AUG. 4, 2021

There are no rules for great nature photos, but here are a few tips that have helped me improve my own shots of the great outdoors:

- ♦ **Decide what your photo is really about**

It's easy to be struck by the entirety of a beautiful scene – the scents, the sounds, the season – but end up with a photo that doesn't capture that experience. To avoid that, take a minute to think about what in particular is special about what you're seeing: is it wide open evening sky? The movement of the wind in the trees? The color of the flowers? A general sense of spaciousness, of freshness, of peace, of mystery?

Then consider what kind of photograph could convey those feelings – a wide panorama with the sky and the land, or maybe a vertical shot of the path ahead of you, or even a close-up of some blossoms. That thought process can help you narrow down what the subject of your photo really is.

- ♦ **Look for the best place to stand**

Taking a few steps to the left or right can have a big impact on how your photo is composed ... but we've all been guilty of taking a quick shot from the first place we happen to stop and then just moving on. Challenge yourself to look critically at your first shot, and then move around and try to improve on it from a few other locations.



This is the difference that moving just a few inches can make: I moved just a few inches to the left between the first photo and the second one. That tiny movement revealed the lower flower and created a more interesting photograph!

- ♦ **“Fill the frame” with your subject – and eliminate everything else**

Whatever is important to you as the photographer – whatever you thought was cool and want to share with your viewer – should be the biggest thing in the photo. Try filling the entire space of the photo with it, unless the real story of the photo is how the subject relates to its surroundings. Then include just enough of the surroundings to tell that story.



◆ **Compose your photo**

Entire books have been written and careers built on the subject of composing photographs, which means arranging the elements of your subject in a pleasing or interesting way. Framing the subject, using the rule of thirds, using leading lines or composing with interesting elements in the foreground, midground and background are just a few of the ways to do this.



When there are trees around it's easy to create a natural frame around the far-off horizon using trunks and branches.



This is an example of the rule of thirds: if you divide a photo into thirds horizontally and vertically by drawing a tic-tac-toe board over it, the spots where the lines intersect are interesting spots to position your subject — in this case, the flower.



Positioning something interesting in the foreground (in this case, the yucca plant), midground (dark treeline) and background (the horizon) can give your photo a strong sense of space.



“Leading lines” guide a viewer’s eye through a photo. Those lines can be literal, like this line of hikers, or implied.

◆ **Get low**

Oftentimes, photos taken from an adult’s standing height seem kind of boring because we grownups are used to seeing the world from that angle. Sometimes you can make a photo more interesting just by crouching or even lying down and showing your subject from an angle they don’t see every day. This is especially true for photos of plants, animals and insects. Get down on their level!



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