

Taking Great Rose Photos by Corinne Geertsen

Part Three: Composition

Prepare the background

Choose an uncluttered background. Funny how things you didn't notice when you looked through the viewfinder are so distracting in the photo. Deadhead a little, cut off a few ugly leaves. Move that plant label. Tie aside a branch to remove shadows from the rose. Maybe you need to move a car or a hose. Perhaps you could move yourself around to another side of the rose.

Does your background help or hurt? If your mulch is ugly either drop it out of focus or drape a black cloth over it.

Hold your roses up so the sky is behind them.

Use a fabric background. This eliminates the background problem altogether and your rose will glow. A black velvet background is easiest to use, as it is the least reflective black fabric. You can pin it to a board or have someone else hold it. Position it a few feet behind the rose if possible.



Moondance bud with black velvet held behind it

A white background can be ethereal with a pale rose. Get a piece of white foamcore board. (This will be a little more difficult and might be best done indoors, as you will probably be working with shadows.)

Pose your Rose

Get down low on eye level with your rose. Walk around it, move up and down with your camera. If you have the skill, groom the rose as if for show.

A three-quarter angle will make a hybrid tea like Marilyn Monroe look even more three dimensional.



Marilyn Monroe, three-quarters view

A rose profile can be fascinating.



Cajun Moon in profile

Add Interest

Just before you shoot, add a lady bug or dot some sugar water on the rose with a Q-tip to attract a bee. Make raindrops on roses with a spray bottle. A real rain (or heavy dew the morning after a rain) is even better, as you will have bigger drops hanging in interesting places.



Abraham Darby after a rain

We like small daisies and lobelia in photo backgrounds and plant them strategically around our roses bushes.



Passionate Kisses with surrounding daisies

The Frame (the outside edge of the photo)

As a general rule, fill the frame.



Touch of Class

Move in close, but when you take the picture leave a little room around the rose so you can crop it just right later.

The rose needs space in front of where it is looking, whether it's looking up or looking to the side. This makes it more comfortable in its frame.

Choose the format that works best with your rose: horizontal or vertical, narrow or square.

Usually a photo looks better with the rose off to the side. But how much?



Cajun Moon, asymmetrical balance

You might consider the rule of thirds. Mentally divide the image into 9 equal parts (with two equally-spaced horizontal lines and two equally-spaced vertical lines). The idea is to place important compositional elements along these lines or their intersection. The rule of thirds is a good starting point.

You can also arrive at a successful composition by thinking of balance.

Balance the rose against the background space around it. The further the rose is from the center of the picture, the more background you need on the other side to balance it. Try several crops until your eye is comfortable with the balance in your picture.

Every now and then a picture works quite well with the rose centered. It's usually a symmetrical rose, and often is a crop of the rose's center. It can be quite powerful.

Remember if you are photographing a rose bush, get in close. Don't photograph half the yard along with it.



Passionate Kisses, up close

Close Relations

With multiples you introduce repetition, a design principle that can make your picture much more interesting. There is power in threes.



Jude the Obscure, trio

Watch for multiples that form shapes. This unifies the picture and makes for interesting eye movement. Note the wreath shape in Our Lady of Guadalupe by Bill Henslin. (This is a winning, lovely photo with beautiful lighting.)



Add drama with contrast

A photo with a dramatic difference between lights and darks can be powerful. You can also contrast with size, perhaps placing a small ladybug on a large old garden rose. Contrast with focus, having your rose sharply in focus and the background a beautiful blur.



light.

Heaven on Earth, contrasting size and

What's the point of interest

Keep in mind that the eye goes right to the brightest parts of the picture. You want the eye to go to your center of interest. Make sure that the brightest part of your picture isn't a hot spot of sun on the leaves behind the rose.

Try to have the brightest light on the part of the rose that's the center of interest.

Most importantly

Know what is it you like about the rose, what you want to show in the photo. Emphasize that. Move in close. Give your photo impact by considering your background, carefully framing your image and adding contrast. It's a lot to think of. Start out with just one or two things in mind next time you are out in the garden with your camera.

If you are interesting in learning more about composition, these are excellent books:

The Photographer's Eye (Michael Freeman)

Design Basics (David A. Lauer) can be found used online