

# Taking Great Rose Photos by Corinne Geertsen

## Part Two: Focus and Lighting

### Sharp Focus

Give your photos snap with sharp focus. Here's how.

**No wind** Never photograph roses in the wind. It just isn't going to work.

### Avoid camera shake

Just a little camera movement can spoil a photograph. Use a tripod. It's the one piece of gear that will take your rose photos to a new level. Use a ballhead to attach your camera to the tripod. This will allow you to securely tilt your camera every which way including straight down. (Note: get a quality tripod and a ballhead that can handle the weight of your gear and your future gear. Your camera will become outdated, but a quality tripod is timeless.) If your lens has a vibration reduction feature, turn it off when you use a tripod. It just works better.



*Heather Sproul photographed with a tripod*

Pushing the shutter release button can shift the camera enough to blur a picture. There are two options to solve this problem. Either use your camera's self timer, or get a remote shutter release cable.

If you must take pictures without a tripod, assume a stable stance: elbows down and tucked into your sides, feet a shoulder-width apart and your camera pressed against your face. Take a deep breath and hold it. Brace yourself against a fence or wall if you can. Squeeze the shutter release button gently. If you are trying to hand hold your camera, remember the longer (the more telephoto) the lens is, the faster the shutter needs to be.

But really, a tripod will work a lot better and you can be sure you got the shot. If you are photographing roses, it will become your new best friend.

## Keep your rose sharp and blur the background.

This is how to separate your blooms from the background and give your picture impact. It's easily done: Set your camera to Aperture Priority (or AV mode with a Canon Camera). The lower aperture numbers open the lens as much as possible and drop the background out of focus. That's what you want.



*Nancy Jean with lobelia behind it dropped out of focus. Note how the center of the rose is in sharp focus.*

The contrast of sharp focus and blurred background makes a striking photo. Lenses produce bokeh, the beautiful blur in out-of-focus areas, especially in their highlights. Some lens are known for the beauty of their bokeh.



*Abraham Darby with bokeh*

Another way to blur the background is to use a longer focal length lens or to zoom in if your lens is a zoom. Yet another is moving your camera closer to the rose. In both cases, the further the background is from your rose, the more the background will be out of focus.

Macro (close-up) photography can produce some fascinating rose photos. Remember that the depth of field (the portion of the scene that's in focus) will be very shallow, like a slice. For macro, plan what you want to focus on and set your camera on spot focus.

It's usually best to have the center of the rose in focus, just as you would make sure the eyes of a person are in focus.

Many point & shoot cameras don't have much of an option for dropping the background out of focus. This is because they have smaller apertures (higher aperture numbers).

## **Let There Be Light**

Natural lighting is best for roses. This is great news for your bank account. You just need to decide whether to shoot outside or bring the roses indoors.

### **Camera Settings: getting the right exposure**

Set your camera to Aperture Control so you can control how much of your picture you want to be in focus. Your camera will automatically choose the correct shutter speed. Set your ISO to the lowest possible setting to reduce noise in your photos.

Get into your camera menu and turn the blinkies on. These are highlight warnings. Overexposed areas will flash on your just-taken picture displayed on the back of your camera, indicating a loss of detail in the highlights. If they're blinking, this is your cue to reduce exposure by lowering Exposure Compensation. (You may need to check your camera manual to get this done.)

Try setting your camera's metering to Spot Meter. This will ensure that a pale rose against a dark background isn't overexposed.

I often set my camera at -1/3 to -1 Exposure Compensation. Somehow this just works for roses. It's definitely something to try.

### **Shooting outdoors on overcast days**

This is the best. You'll get rich colors and no harsh shadows. If you get tired of waiting for an overcast day, shoot in the shade.



*Moondance photographed in morning shade.*

Drop everything to photograph your roses just after a rain. Grab your camera and walk out the door while there are still clouds in the sky and pearls of rain on your roses.

## **Shooting outdoors in direct sun**

Don't shoot in mottled shade. There will be annoying patterns of hot spots and shadows across the rose.

If you shoot in direct sun you'll have distracting, harsh shadows. Try a white surface to bounce light back onto the rose and fill in the harsh shadows. A white foamcore board works quite well.

Another way: Get down low and shoot backlit, with the sun behind the rose for a luminous effect. Rose petals are translucent and can take on quite a glow. This works especially well with light roses.



*Brass Band, backlit*

Yet another way to shoot in direct sun is to hold a diffuser between the rose and the sun. (A diffuser is translucent material attached to a lightweight frame.) This will soften the shadows and help you avoid the odd colors that often come with direct sunlight. Get a diffuser that's easy to hold with one hand or get someone to hold it for you. (A white diffuser will also work to bounce light to fill in shadows.) Experiment holding it different distances from the rose.

## **Shooting indoors with window lighting**

The beauty of window lighting is that it is indirect and soft. Set your rose up near a window so that it's lit from the side. Simplify your background by putting a black or white surface behind the rose. (Place it at least several feet behind the rose so it drops out of focus.)

Try positioning a piece of white foamcore outside the picture's edges on the dark side of the rose to bounce the window light back onto it, filling in your rose's deep shadows. Use clamps to clip your background and reflector to chairs. (Many photographers use the inexpensive orange handled A-clamps found in all hardware stores.)



*Bolero with a white surface below to bounce light up underneath the bloom*

Don't try indoor shots without a tripod, as your shutter speed will be slower and put you at risk for all kinds of camera shake.

Tip: Perhaps as you are reading this there are not a lot of photo-worthy roses out the back door? Go to the florist or grocery store and bring home a rose to practice on to get ready to photograph your great roses of the coming season.

Part Three: Composition