

PHOTOGRAPHING ROSES – Martin Skinner
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Almost anyone can get a good picture of a rose, no matter what type of camera is used, if care is taken of the conditions of picture taking. Better pictures usually can be taken with the more complex cameras because there is more control over the conditions. The following are a few of the details – conditions – that generally apply when using any camera and those that can be used with the more sophisticated cameras. Remember, it is you who judges the quality of the picture. If you like it, it's a good picture. You only worry about how another person views the quality if you enter the picture into competition of some sort.

There are two general types of cameras used by novice photographers: point and shoot (PAS); and single lens reflex (SLR). Both types are available for use with film as well as digital memory cards.

The PAS camera basically is a camera that will automatically focus on the image as well as select the correct shutter speed and lens aperture depending upon the light conditions. Thus, just look through the view finder and push the button. Some of the PAS cameras have a further aid: a zoom feature to enlarge the image. The most advanced of this type of camera (usually the digital version) provides for making specific selections of, for example, aperture and speed through settings via the "Menu" to override automatic control. A review of the manual for the camera will show what features the camera exhibits.

A SLR camera usually has more controls for setting the conditions of the picture taking. They, also, usually permit the use of specialized filters to enhance the image, e.g., a polarizing filter to eliminate glare. SLR cameras can be fitted with special lens, such as telephoto lenses to shorten the apparent distance between the camera and the rose, or a macro lens permitting placing the camera close to the rose.

Assuming you know the limitations of your camera, now look at the specific filming conditions. Some "experts" suggest that you completely fill the frame with the rose while others place the rose off center. If you chose the latter, position the image of the rose so that it "looks into" the center of the frame. You may have to shoot from an angle to accomplish this. Still other "experts" suggest you try filming just part of the rose for an abstract view. To do this, you need to get close to the rose; however, your camera may not focus that closely. This is where a telephoto "zoom" is effective as the camera is more removed from the rose and the camera can focus on the rose or rose portion. Here, as in other filming selections, a digital camera has a great advantage as shots you don't like can be immediately discarded. With film-containing cameras, you don't know until all of the film is used and after the film is processed.

A poor background is often the cause of making a poor picture. It may be other parts of the rose bush, mulch, etc. There are several ways to overcome this problem. You can place a matte-finish sheet behind the rose to block out view of anything else. Another way is to take the shot from down low so the background is the sky – blue or with clouds. Still another way, if your camera will provide the settings, is to put background out of focus so that only the rose itself is in focus. This is known as using "depth of focus" features of the camera. Generally, this involves using a large to medium large lens aperture. With the digital camera you can "shoot" as many times as you want until you get the desired result.

Bright sunlight or direct overhead light is detrimental to getting a good picture as it creates harsh shadows. So is light from a low angle. Diffuse light is best. Bright light can be “tamed” by using a thin cloth as a diffuser. When there are too many shadows, use a reflector – a white surface – to cast light into the desired parts of the rose. Light can be controlled, also, by taking the picture from a different angle to the rose. A “fill flash” also can place light in otherwise dark portions of the rose.

Ideally, the camera should be placed on a tripod to enhance the focus: it takes only the slightest movement to de-focus the rose. You may not see the effect as you take the picture, but you will see it later on the film or on the image from the digital recording medium.

Assuming you have a digital camera, take multiple shots of the rose from different angles and under different degrees of light and focus. You will then have a rose that is “picture perfect”.

[Some references: “Introduction to Digital Garden Photography” – Donald R. Burger, www.burger.com/garphoto.htm;
“Photographing Roses” – Rich Baer, *American Rose*, May 2005, p. 35. Others may be located by using “Google” with the topic “Photographing Roses”]