

# Tips on Photographing Plants



...from Ace Botanist and Photographer, [Arthur Haines](#)

1. I make sure the light on the subject is relatively uniform. Dark shadows across the image distract from seeing the object properly. Sometimes I artificially shade the plant (using my body or that of a companion) in order to have uniform light. Photography is best on bright overcast days, which means lots of light but no sharply contrasting shadows.
2. I photograph those features that are diagnostic for the plant identification. This isn't hard to determine—identification keys like Go Botany and this course's field worksheet tell us what is important. I try to photograph those details (instead of the pretty shots that don't show much of value).
3. I remove distracting items in the photograph—such as a leaf or branch that diagonally traverses the frame. I'm not saying I clear the whole area, I just remove enough to ensure that the target plant can be seen clearly in the photograph.
4. I try to make sure I have enough light to have a depth of field focus that won't leave important items blurry. In other words, I want to use high F-stop numbers to have more of the depth of the photograph in focus. This is not always possible (especially with cameras that employ auto-focus), but I will do what I can to ensure crisp focus.
5. I take *lots* of digital photographs and discard many: I'm looking to make sure I captured images that were in focus.
6. Every camera is different—and learning how each camera focuses and captures close, crisp images is a must. For example, my camera (a Sony) uses a laser hologram system for focusing that is simply better than my eye. I use the automatic focus whenever I can (assuming it is focusing on what I want). Certain colors look cartoon-like from my camera (deep reds and magentas), this is a limitation of this camera. Practice and get to know the ins and outs of the camera so it can be used to its full potential.
7. Use a camera that can capture as least 5-megapixel images, which includes most cameras these days (but many cameras have settings with resolution below this figure). Such images may not have the necessary resolution to identify species from complicated taxonomic groups. Most cameras are equipped with a macro feature (denoted by a flower silhouette) that allows you to take high-quality close-ups. But using this feature and maintaining focus takes practice.
8. Remember that a camera cannot “do it all,” especially if small features are necessary to help you identify a plant. So take notes, do a sketch, and if necessary, collect a specimen of the plant to take home.

Here is a great website that offers basic tips on photographing invasive plants for identification (from the Early Detection and Mapping Distribution System (EDDMapS):

[https://www.eddmaps.org/about/take\\_pictures.cfm](https://www.eddmaps.org/about/take_pictures.cfm)