

Taking Your Own Photographs

These are some rules to help you take better photos for the web site. As with most rules, they can be broken, but you really should know what you are doing and trying to accomplish before breaking them.

1. For plants, do not take photos in direct sunlight. Direct sunlight creates harsh contrasts that wash out colors and make everything look flat and pure white colors come out over-exposed with blurry edges. Take photos early in the morning, or in the early evening, on a cloudy day, or stand in front of your subject to block direct sunlight and photograph in your own shadow. Sometimes taking a photo with the sun in front of your subject makes the plant glow and gets around the contrast problem.
2. For plants, determine what you want to show in the photo and plan the photo to show that. What is the reason for the photo? For the color of something; for the form of a plant; for the damage? Be sure to show what you want, and try to eliminate or minimize the rest. Is there a distracting background -- move around to get a different angle. Don't photograph an entire bush to show a few dead twigs. Don't show an entire green bush to demonstrate its flower or leaf structure.
3. For plants, pick a contrasting background to the subject you want to show. Green leaves -- then pick a light background. Red flower -- then use a dark green background in shadow. Avoid busy backgrounds with lots of things going on. No need to show the air conditioner, garden hose, and basement windows along with the blue hydrangea. Try adjusting the depth of field on the lens to blur the background out of focus. Don't photograph something with no contrast such as a brown fungus on a brown tree branch.
4. Two is better than one. Many times, a handful or group of flowers makes a better photo than just one specimen. It also gives a better sense of scale.
5. Sometimes the context and surrounding is important, and sometimes it is not. A photo of a wreath shows detail, but stepping back to show the effect of the wreath on the door gives it context and scale -- decide what you want to show in the photo.
6. Take several trial photos and select the best. For example, take a flower photograph of one, then two, then three or more together, then one from the sun angle, one from behind, one looking up, one blowing in the breeze. Then decide which one illustrates the point you are making in the story.

Remember that the photo is there to illustrate a point in your story -- not to win a photography contest or publicize your garden.