



Tammy Marlar
PHOTOGRAPHER

The urgency to protect our natural world in all its forms gave me a fulfilling career at the forefront of global conservation for 20 years, directing many high-profile fundraising and communications campaigns for various NGO's. In 2013, I retrained as photographer, and now am very happy to be continuing this call to action through my photography.

My interest in garden photography was sparked by an introduction around this time to Tom & Sue Stuart-Smith. They invited me to practise in their renowned garden in Hertfordshire, as I started out on this new journey. I visited the garden once a month regularly for several years. With Tom's artistic genius as a plantsman providing the most exquisite backdrop, I began to specialise in flower portraits and close-up, macro studies of the miniature wildlife in the garden. In 2016, I won the New Shoots Award in the International Garden Photographer of the Year, an award designed for emerging garden photography talent, and improved on this with a 2nd place in the 2017 competition, and again commended in 2018.

My garden photography work is characterized by fine art principles of composition, lighting, and drama. I am particularly inspired by harmonious and striking colour palettes which are a strong theme in my work and often a critical start-point for my image creation.

I'm delighted to have won various other international awards for my wildlife images and have been published in national and photographic media, most notably (and proudly) as a regular contributor to Outdoor Photography magazine. Whilst my first love is undoubtedly shooting in nature - wildlife, birds, insect life, flowers and landscapes - I also work for companies, organisations, individuals and families, commissioned to shoot gardens, interiors, events, and portraits (both formal headshots and group portraits). In addition, I regularly write, lecture and teach wildlife and macro photography.

I am a member of the Garden Media Guild and the Professional Garden Photographers Association.

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Vistas
Portraits
Wildlife
Publications

Vistas

A VIEW IN THE GARDEN



Official photographer for
Urquhart Hunt's Gold Medal/Best in Show garden at the 2022 RHS Chelsea Flower Show,
Partnering with Rewilding Britain and supported by ProjectGivingBack





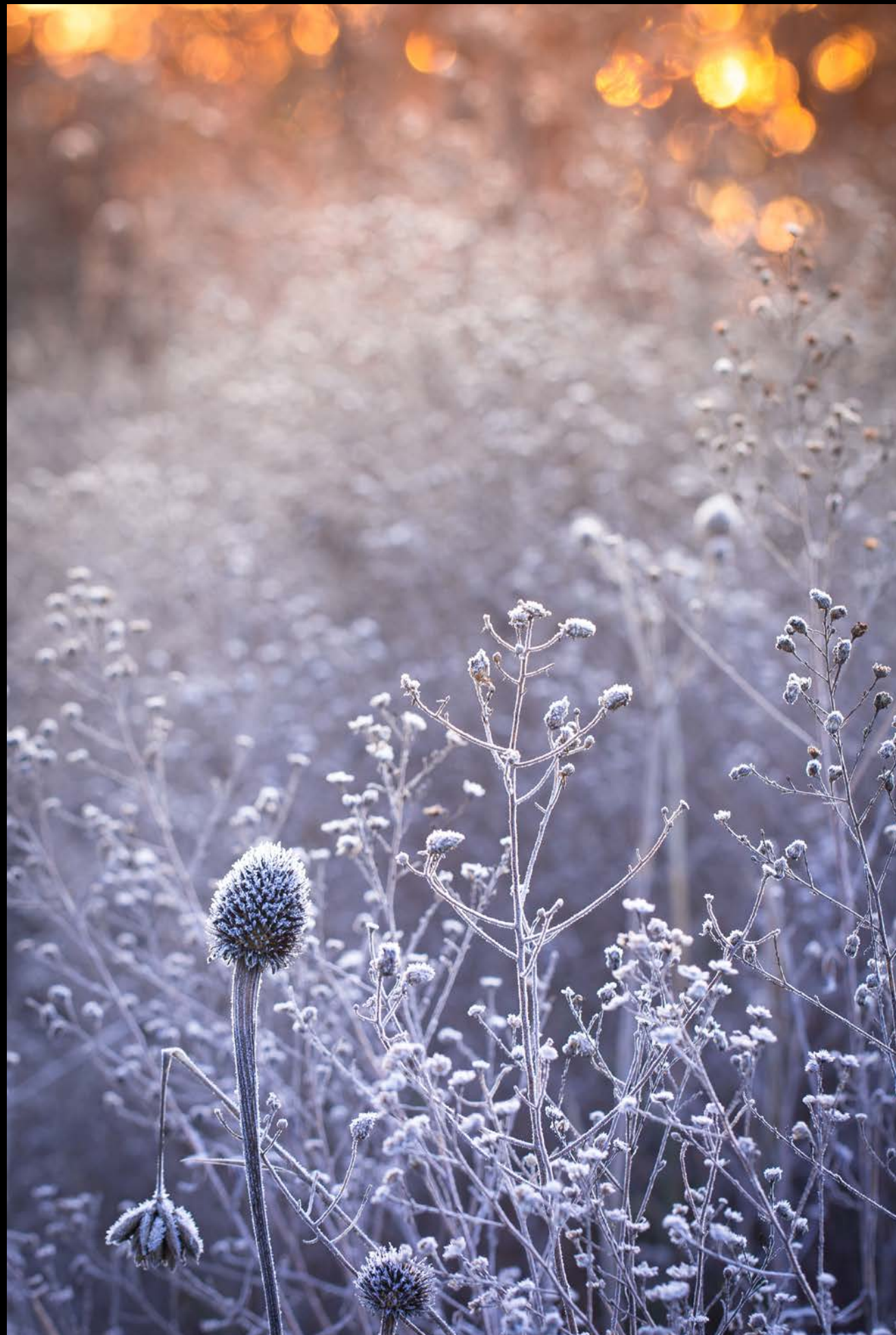
“How beautiful and moving the photos you took during those magical weeks are.
Thank you so, so much for giving us such a wonderful record of those days forever.”

Adam Hunt





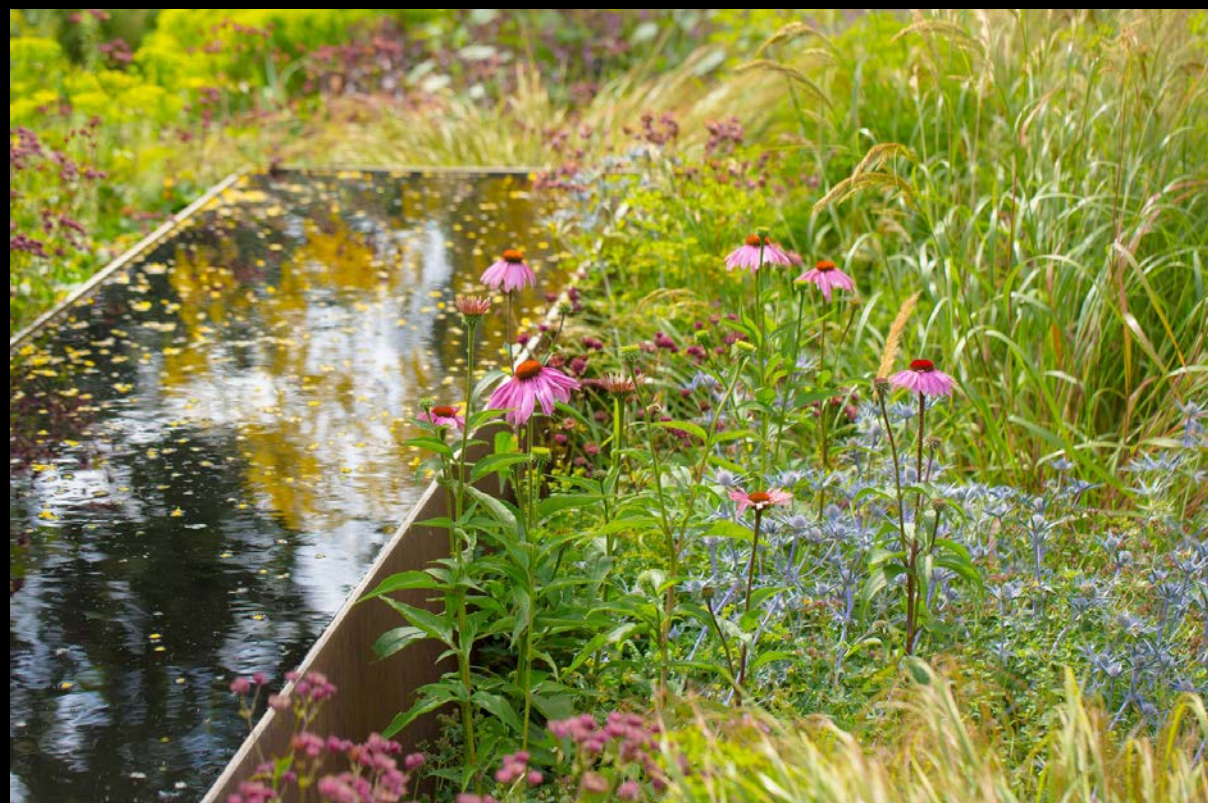
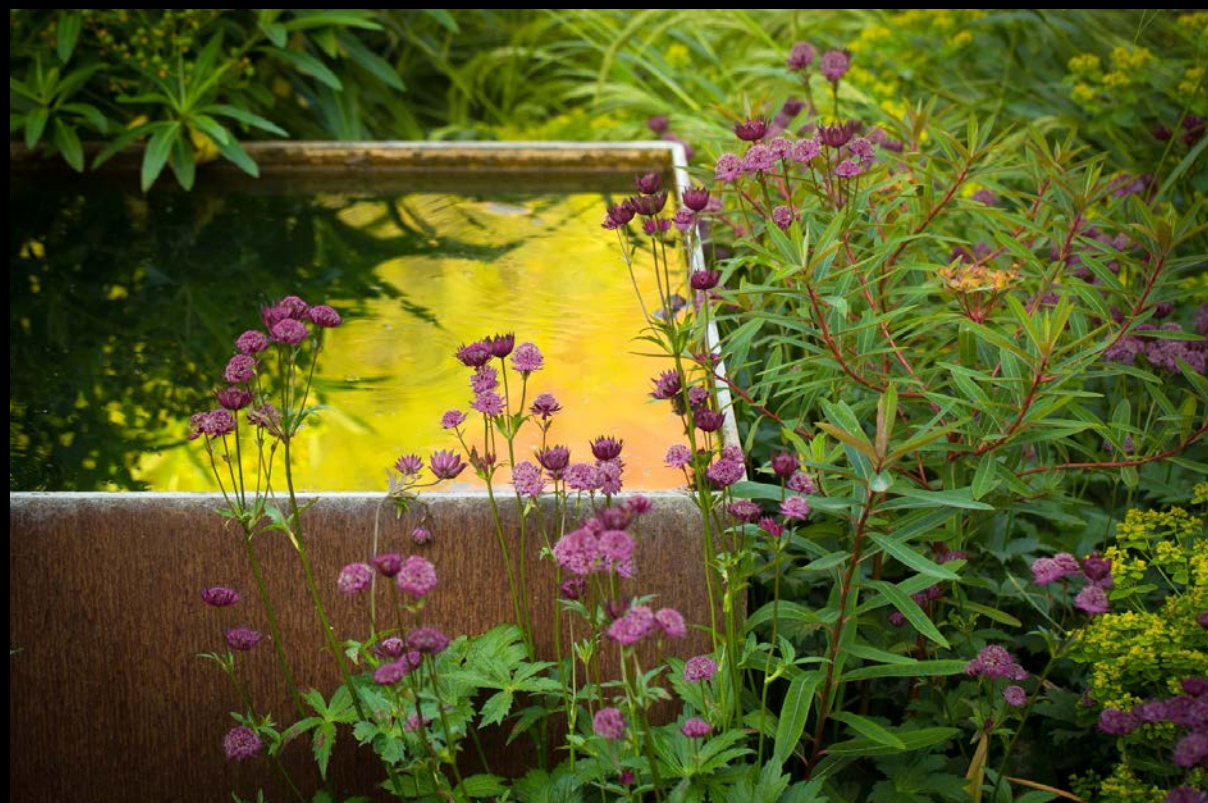




















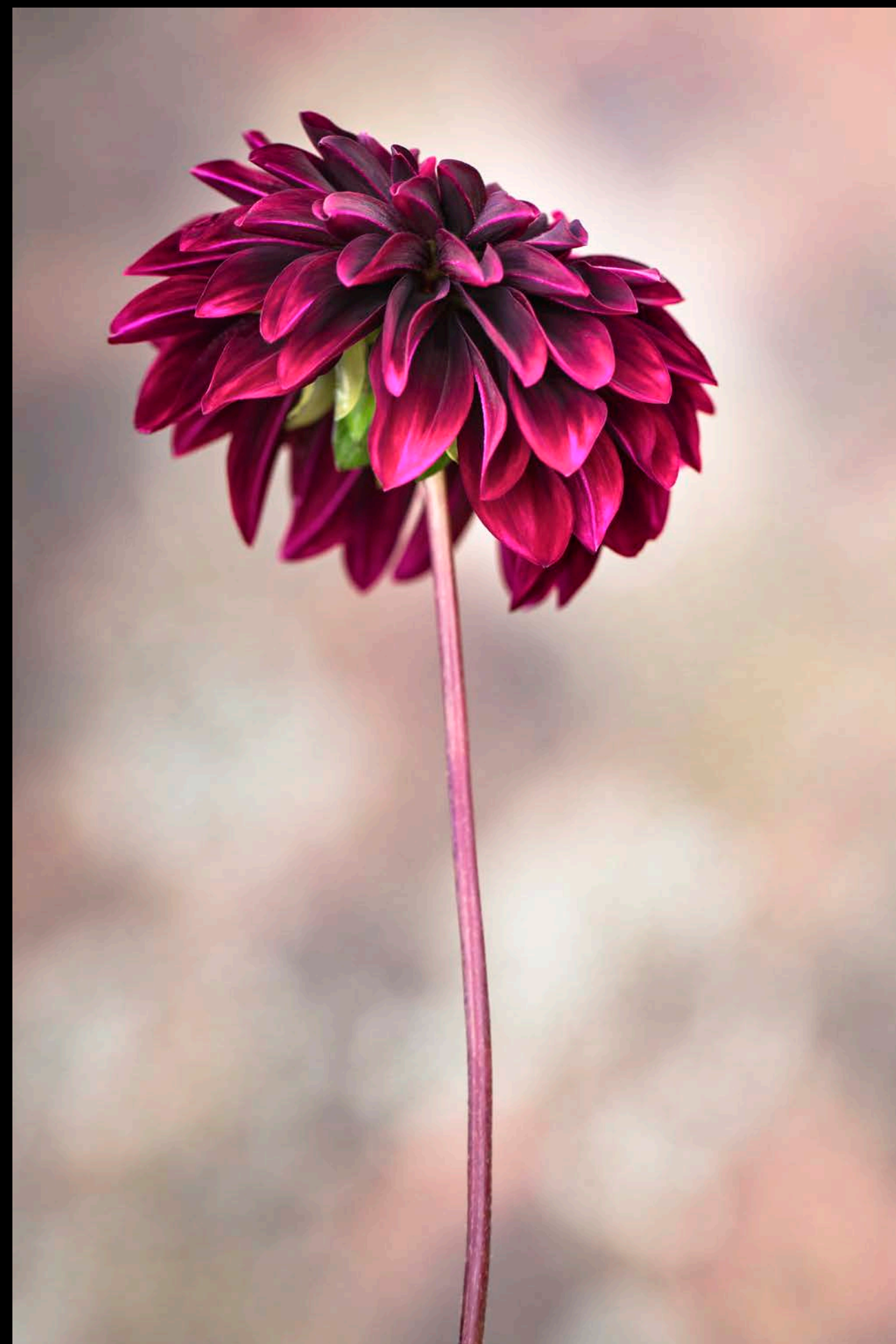


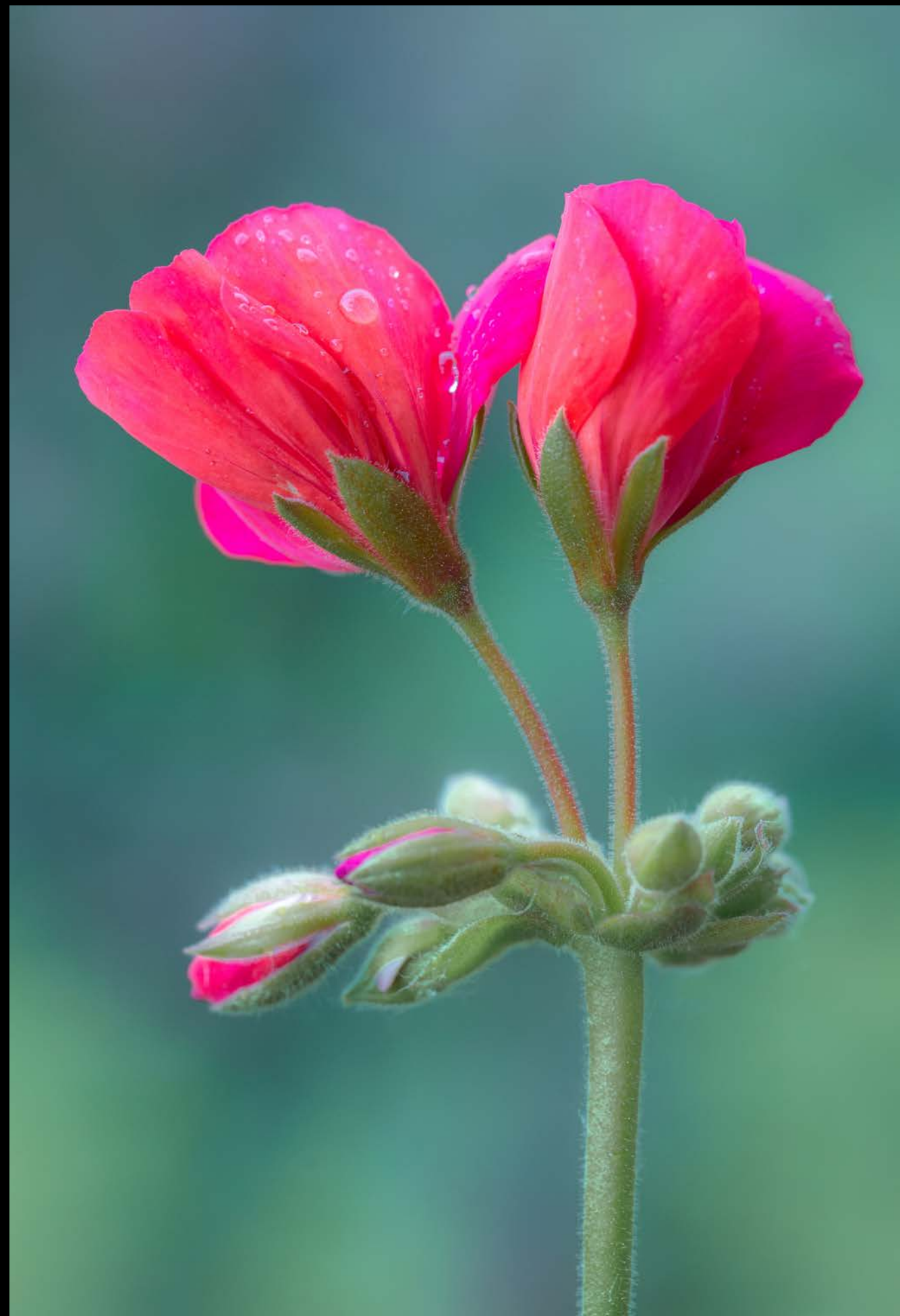
Portraits

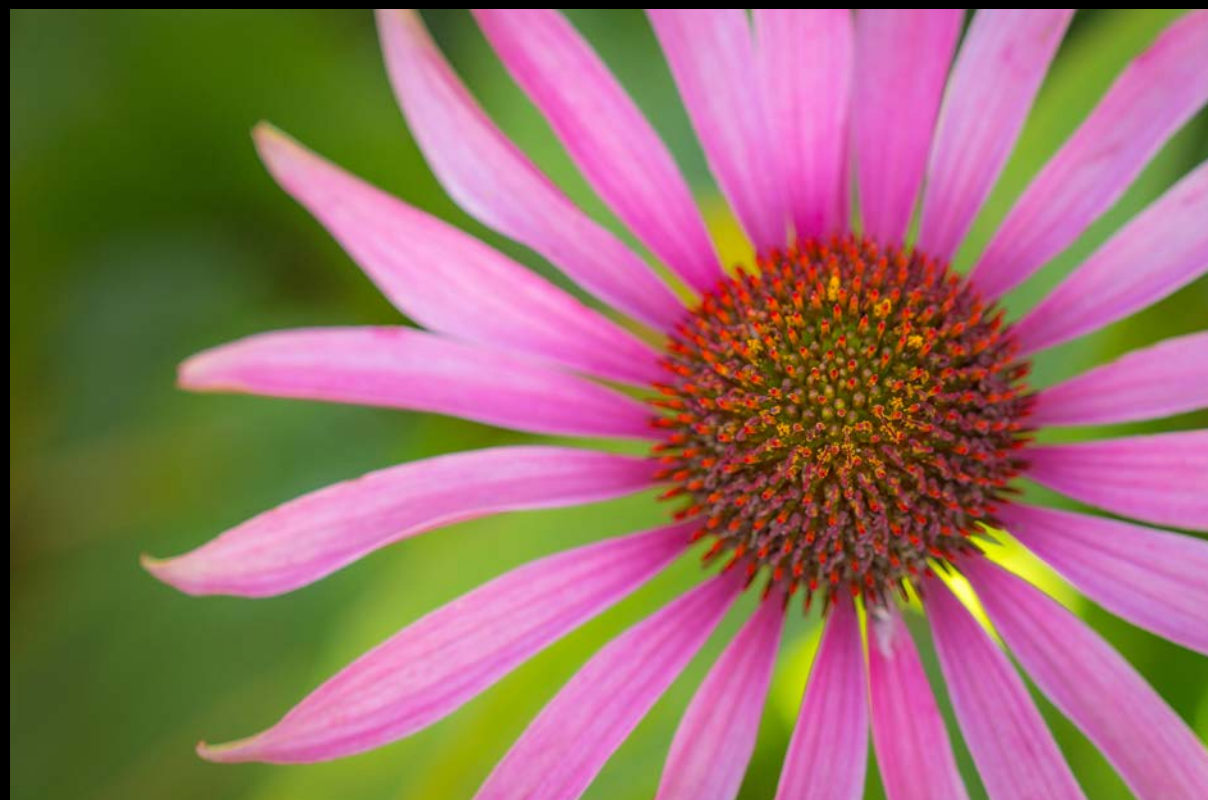
LOOKING AT DETAILS





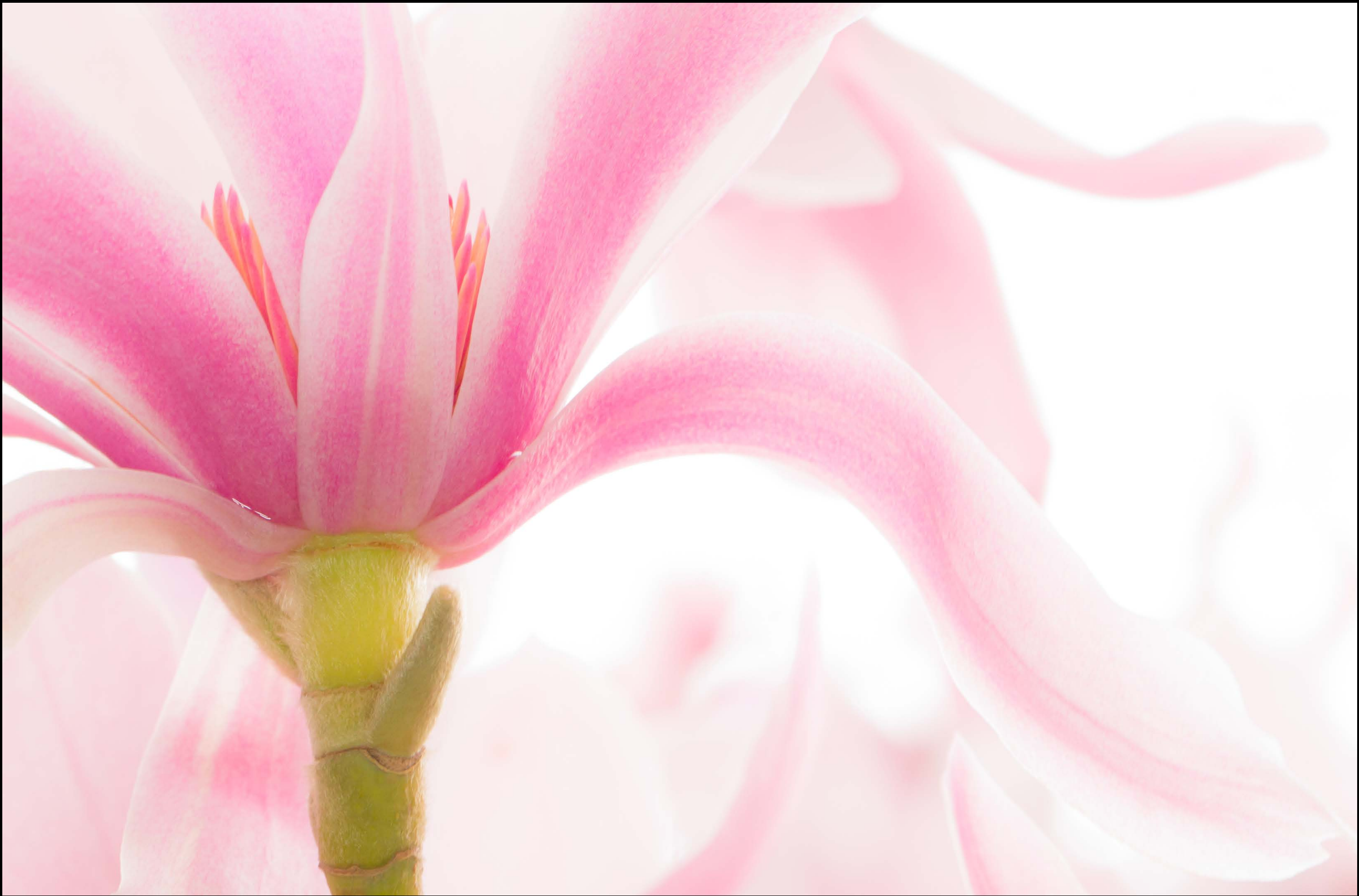


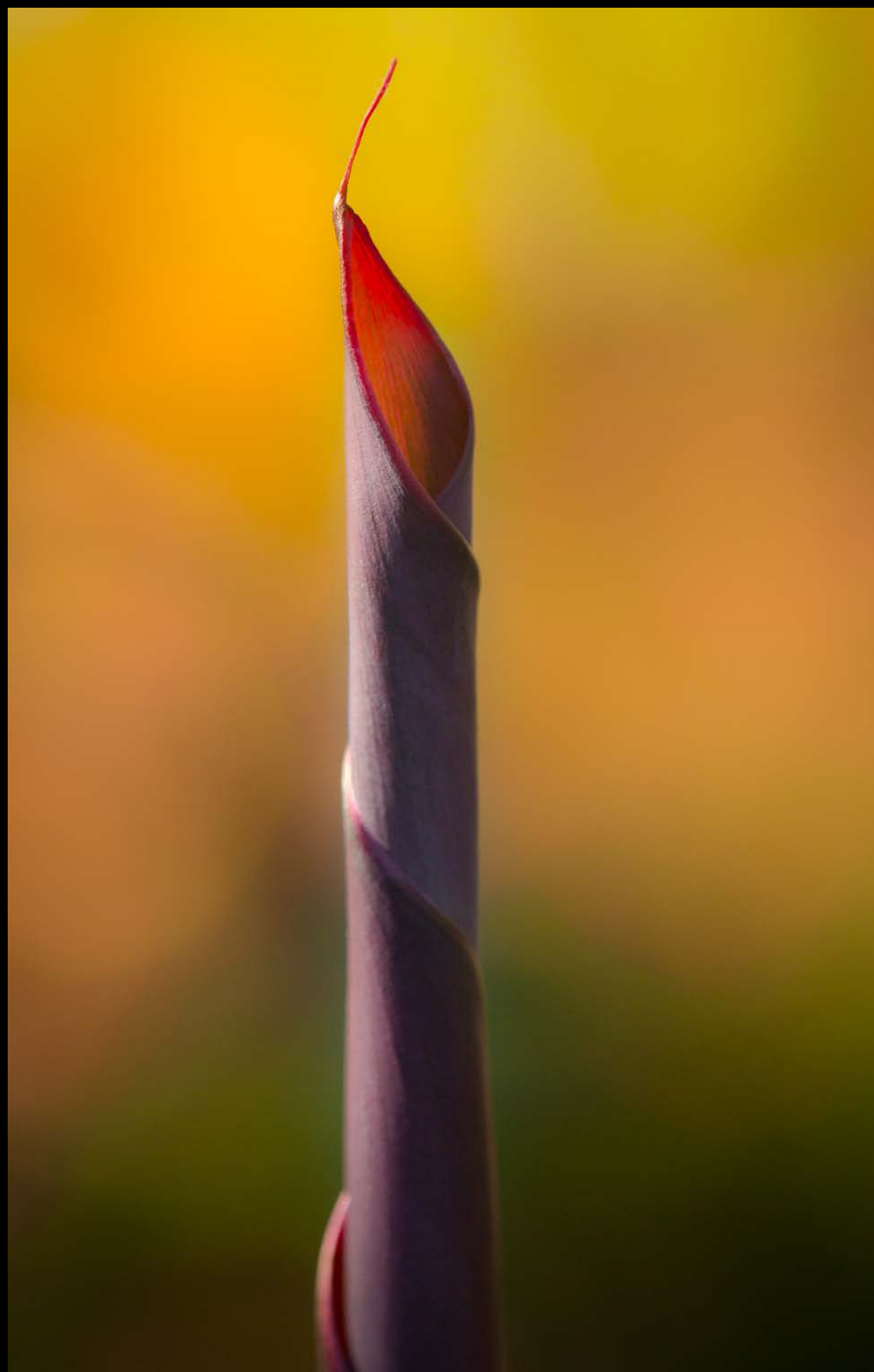


















Wildlife

IN THE GARDEN



2nd place, Captured at Kew category
'International Garden Photographer of the Year' 2017
Shortlisted, 'Close-up Photographer of the Year' 2020





















Publications



In our Autumn issue we asked you to send us your most inspiring images of autumn colour, and your photographs astounded us. In one of the toughest competitions to date, this is our winner, who gets a Goal Zero Nomad 7 Plus solar panel, and 16 runners-up...



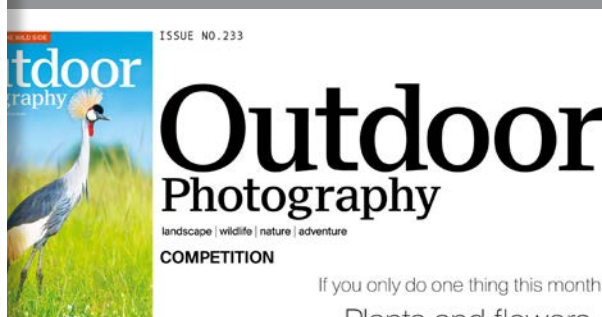
Tammy Marlar
Below I loved this scene at Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, for its individual story and its simplicity. Sometimes, there is an expectation for autumn pictures to deliver a panoramic, show-stopping punch, but I loved the intimacy and

small scale of this composition, together with the full gamut of autumn colours on show and the carpet of leaves beneath the tree.

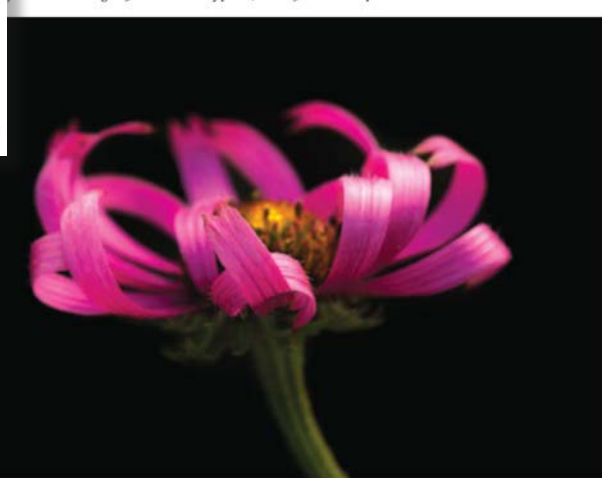
Canon EOS 5D MkIII with Canon EF 180mm f/5.5 L macro USM lens, ISO 500, 1/400sec at f/5.5
tammymarlar.com

Readapted Publication

108 Outdoor Photography January 2018



In our issue we asked you to submit your best photographs of plants and flowers, and high quality entries took our breath away. Here is our winner, who receives a MindShift Gear BackLight 36L Photo Daypack, and 15 runners-up...



Below Tammy Marlar
I took this echinacea flower at the Royal Botanic Gardens Kew. It was just in the process of unfurling, and the bright fuchsia petals reminded me of the beautiful way my mother would decorate our presents with sumptuous curling, dragon-tongue bows and ribbons.

Canon EOS 5D MkIII with Canon EF 180mm Macro f/5.5 L USM lens and 1.4x extender, ISO 640, 1/400sec at f/5.5
tammymarlar.com

Readapted Publication

110 Outdoor Photography August 2018



COMPETITION

If you only do one thing this month...
Close-up and macro nature

In our April issue we invited you to send us your best close-up and macro photographs, and we were bowled over by the quantity and the quality of the entries. Here's the winner of the Joby GorillaPod Focus tripod with Ball Head X and a Joby Pro Sling Strap, plus our 13 runners-up...



Winner Tammy Marlar

Above I took this shot at the Wex Lens Show in London at the end of April. There was a macro-setup featuring some insects, including this chap, a giant rainforest mantis from Australia. The pinks, oranges and yellows on his body were incredibly vibrant against the beautifully lit green backdrop and very well-framed by the arch of darker foliage. Despite the external lighting, I still had to use quite a high ISO in conjunction

with an f/8 aperture so that I could capture some of the incredible detail on his thorax and front legs. His expression and his body language made me think of a reluctant actor who has been thrust centre stage, but who would have been much happier waiting in the wings! Canon EOS 5D MkIII with Canon EF 100mm f/2.8 USM lens, ISO 1250, 1/250sec at f/8, lighting and backdrop by Wild Arena
tammymarlar.com

104 Outdoor Photography August 2018



If you only do one thing this month...

Insect and critters

In our May issue we asked you to submit your best photographs of insects and critters, and the standard of your entries was outstanding. Here is our winner, who receives a MindShift Gear BackLight 36L Photo Daypack, and 14 runners-up...



Above WINNER Tammy Marlar

This bee, dusted all over in pollen and with two sizeable pollen baskets, hovers to survey a patch of autumn crocuses in its quest for yet more pollen, at Royal Botanic Gardens Kew in late September last year.

Canon EOS 5D MkIII with Canon EF 180mm f/5.5 L macro USM lens and 1.4x extender, ISO 400, 1/1600sec at f/5.5
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Readapted Publication

102 Outdoor Photography September 2018

LEARNING ZONE



How to take stunning photographs of plants and flowers

Flowers are blooming in our gardens and across the countryside, making this the perfect time to put your botanical photography skills into practice; Tammy Marlar shows you how to capture standout images

Flowers have it all: colour, shape, texture and even personality – the sheer volume of flower photos posted on social media and photo sharing sites every day bears testament to their appeal. Not all flower photographs are created equal, however. So how do you make your images stand out from the rest and give them that ‘wow’ factor?

As with any genre of photography, there are general rules and guidelines, tips and tricks to make the best flower images possible. Conversely, though, there is a saying, attributed to the late, great World War II hero Douglas Bader: ‘Rules are there for the obedience of fools and the guidance of wise men’. My personal approach would seem to have this sentiment at its core: there have been a couple of key influences at play for me. Firstly, as a self-taught photographer, falling over and getting up has been the only available method of learning open to me. Consequently, I’ve developed my own particular set of rules. Secondly, as a mother of young children, I often have to work to break-neck schedules at times of day or in weather conditions that aren’t always ideal. This has proved to me that, whatever your particular circumstances, you can always make the best of your available time.

Above: Make the flower, such as this pink dahlia, the dominant subject. Flowers are beautiful and intricate, and our images should accentuate their allure and infinite detail as much as possible. Canon EOS 5D MkIII with Canon EF 100mm f/2.8 L Macro IS USM lens, ISO 640, 1/200sec at f/5.6, handheld

PREPARING FOR A SHOOT

Planning for a flower photography shoot starts with the weather. Watch the forecast for a few days before you plan to head out, and consult a couple of different sources. Wind is very rarely your friend, although you can make a feature of it if you wish, by emphasising movement. Harsh, overhead sunlight is not conducive to successful photography either, as it can create deep shadows that interfere with shape and colour.

My favourite time to be photographing a garden is undoubtedly at sunrise or on a clear, sunny day. There is nothing as magical as being alone in a beautiful garden when the day is dawning. On such mornings, a garden and its wildlife seem to sing with the unspoken joy of a new day. The golden light of late afternoons can also be stunning; shoot towards the sun for beautiful backlit subjects. Overcast skies can provide you with naturally diffused lighting, which is especially good for macro work.

As photographers, we work almost exclusively with natural light, so developing an awareness of its impact on the garden and your images is a vital skill. Lighting can create drama, depth and atmosphere; it can emphasise shape, texture and form, and bring colour to life. Whether you are shooting in your garden or in a wild landscape, get to know your location well. Notice where the sun rises and where it sets. Further absorb yourself in the location and discover how it breathes. This may take a few visits, at different times of day and in different seasons.

Don’t be fooled into thinking winter is a downtime for garden photographers. Shooting during late autumn and in winter can yield incredible results because of the quality of the light. Winter light brings out the visual play between highlights and shadows, as well as cool and warm tonalities.

Essential kit

Next, you need to decide which lenses and accessories to pack. Three words: prepare for weight. I use a Canon EOS 5D MkIII, and try, if possible, to take my four main Canon lenses along. As well as my two macros – the EF 180mm f/3.5 L IS USM and the EF 100mm f/2.8 L IS USM – I pack my 70–200mm f/2.8 L IS II and 24–70mm f/2.8 L IS USM lenses, as well as a wireless trigger. Added extras might include a light stand, triggers, ring flash and



flashgun – although I won’t always use them. Other crucial kit includes plain black and white card backdrops, a kneeling pad, nail scissors, freezer ties and clothes pegs for managing stray stems. I also sometimes use a plant clamp (essentially two clamps at either end of an articulating arm); one end is clamped to a tripod leg or to a small tree nearby and the other end to the stem of the flower to hold it steady. It can also hold a small reflector.

Handheld versus tripod

I was a particular lens that made me fall in love with flower photography; the great Canon EF 100mm f/2.8 L IS USM. While image stabilisation is a common feature to regulate shake, this lens features a groundbreaking Hybrid Image Stabiliser system, which counteracts regular angular shake and lateral shift/shake – both are exaggerated when shooting extreme close-ups. It’s a really beautiful lens that responds brilliantly, even to subjects changing position.

Most probably because of this lens, I don’t subscribe wholly to the view that a tripod is a must-have accessory. I always try to have one with me, mostly for early morning low light, but I prefer not to use it. Having lost most of my right hand in a terrible car accident at university, I find operating a tripod fairly cumbersome – although this improved considerably when I was introduced to a joystick head. But, aside from the mechanics, I find that a tripod can put a barrier between me and the subject. I am photographing, and can interfere with dynamic, fluid movement. I want the freedom to respond to the moment. A hoverfly lands; much of my flower photography is a good example of what can be achieved without a tripod.

In its favour, using a tripod forces you to slow down when composing an image, which can lead you to become more meticulous and think carefully about how the subject is portrayed. A tripod is also essential if you want to blend multiple exposures or to use focus-stacking techniques (see page 31).

Above: Blossom is often accompanied by stiff spring winds, so be prepared to shoot at high shutter speeds, using a high ISO. Canon EOS 5D MkIII with Canon EF 100mm f/2.8 L Macro IS USM lens, ISO 2000, 1/800sec at f/5, handheld

COMPOSITION

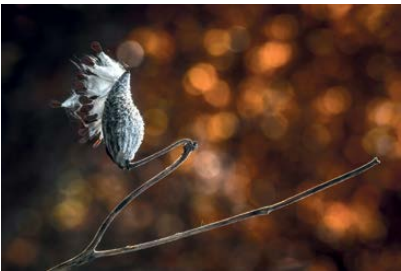
One of the coolest things about nature photography is that it puts you in a frame of mind where you are searching for beauty. Additionally, I strive to spark emotions and tell a story in my flower photography. Plants, especially when lit for added drama, seem to reveal a kind of personality all of their own. Insects add another element and show symbiotic relationships at work.

Try shooting from different angles: bend down, look up or get down on your knees. Be patient – it takes time. You cannot just take a quick shot and go home. Sit down at the level of the flowers and really look at them. It’s when you spend time watching that you discover more than the casual photographer does. I rarely shoot a single photo of a flower or a series from just one angle. The more you stay with a subject, the more you can discover about it. I met the famous portrait and fashion photographer Clive Arrowsmith recently (look him up, his pictures are sublime). ‘Devotion to the moment!’ he said excitedly, and it shows in his work. It’s not the devil that’s in the detail; it’s the angel.

With flower portraits, remember the rule of thirds and always try to isolate the subject. We’ve all seen images of flowers, birds or insects with cluttered or ugly backgrounds. The main subject gets lost in the muddle and the picture just doesn’t work. Flowers are beautiful and intricate, and our images should accentuate their allure and infinite detail as much as possible. Compose the image in a way that keeps the flower the predominant focus, by avoiding things that will interfere with the subject. Distractions come in many forms, such as having too much of the image in focus, uncomplementary patterns or colours, or areas of the image with hotspots. All these things will cause the viewer to lose interest in the star of the photo. Also remember that it’s not always necessary to include the whole flower in the shot. Try something different: by focusing on only a small part of the flower – perhaps a petal or part of a petal, the stamen, or some other part of the flower. Abstract images evoke a sense of mystery and curiosity.

Getting close with zoom lenses

People generally associate flower photography with macro lenses, and this doesn’t always have to be the case. I love using my 70–200mm f/2.8 lens for flower photography at the longer end of the zoom. This lens has a minimum focusing distance of 3.9 feet (1.2m) at all focal lengths, so I can use it to shoot close to my subjects. To get closer still, I often flip into manual focus. This in turn necessitates more mindful composing



and some serious arm strength to keep the camera steady. But I love the way it renders flowers and backgrounds, easily separating the subject from the rest. As long as my subject is against a background that can be thrown out of focus, powerful results can be readily achieved.

Beautiful backlighting

Use the sun creatively, and shoot towards it for beautiful backlit images. It may be that changing the camera’s orientation may eliminate a distracting highlight, or enable you to add a new backlit element you hadn’t noticed before.

The wider view

Sometimes it’s worth stepping back and looking at the bigger picture. Rather than honing in on a single flower, consider including several flowers, or an entire vista. Not seeing the wood for the trees can equally be a virtue in flower photography. Details are great, but it may be a good idea to include some images that will tell more of the story. So take a few steps back or use a wide-angle lens to take in more of the scene. Look for symmetry, visual stepping-stones and lead-in lines as you would if you were composing a landscape.

Background considerations

The canvas is every bit as important as the subject itself. By throwing your aperture wide open at close range, the background becomes a smoothly varying, out-of-focus patch of colour. It’s important to choose a background that complements the colour and tone of your foreground subject. Fractional adjustments in position at close range can completely change the background. Take care to exclude distracting out-of-focus highlights or other objects, and don’t be afraid to reposition objects to improve the background (this is where a clothes peg can come in handy).

A great way of bringing a studio feel to the outdoors is to look for dramatic light on the flowers and then use coloured cards as a backdrop. Place the card behind the flower, choosing colour tones that blend well to bring out the subject. Dianne English, winner of the Beauty of Plants category in this year’s International Garden Photographer of the Year, hand-painted a delicate pastel background to set behind a curved stem of a bignonia, which was then blended with the original image in post-processing. Using a



very small aperture (f/18) for her original shot meant the flowers were perfectly focused at very close range. The blend was stunning and elevated her technically perfect flowers into a stunning fine-art masterpiece.

You don’t have to use the background in your flower image at all; using flash and a relatively high shutter speed, you can illuminate the flower and drop the background completely out of the image. Set the shutter speed to about 1/400th of a second and the aperture to f/5.6 or f/8. Use a manual flash set to about 1/8th or 1/16th power to provide just a small pop of light to the flowers, rather than the background. Adjust the settings depending on how much ambient light there is. A piece of dark card positioned behind the subject might work just as well if you don’t want to add supplementary flash. If you’re not able to drop out the background completely in-camera, it can be worked on easily in Lightroom. Adjust the shadows slider a little to the left, and use the adjustment brush or radial filters to lower the exposure behind the subject.

Below (left): Choose a dark background to give low-key, studio-style portraits. You can darken the background in post-processing, or use a black card behind your subject. Water droplets have added extra poignancy. Canon EOS 5D MkIII with Canon EF 100mm f/2.8 L Macro IS USM lens, ISO 200, 1/100sec at f/4, handheld

Below (right): Choose a background that complements the colour and tone of your foreground subject, such as this dahlia. Canon EOS 5D MkIII with Canon EF 100mm f/2.8 L Macro IS USM lens, ISO 640, 1/220sec at f/5.6, handheld



UNDERSTANDING COLOUR

A colour wheel gives a visual reference guide for using colour. Segments of colour that lie opposite one another are said to be complementary, while segments that lie next to each other are said to be harmonious. Colour is perhaps the most important aspect to my photography; it’s what catches my attention and draws me in. Take time to notice it, because an awareness of colour relationships will enhance your images. A skilful gardener has a heightened awareness of how colour works in a garden, and it’s one of the main responsibilities of a flower photographer to respond to this heightened sensitivity. It’s vital to be selective and for your images not to get lost in a riot of colour. Look for clean lines and strong colours. Make your photographs more graphic by filling the frame with a single colour or texture. The high contrast of complementary colours creates a vibrant look, especially with increased saturation, but this colour scheme must be well managed.



Below: Look for harmonious colours and storytelling details. With markings resembling eyes, a nose and a mouth, this seed head appears to be in conversation with the one next to it. Canon EOS 5D MkIII with Canon EF 100mm f/2.8 L Macro IS USM lens, ISO 200, 1/200sec at f/3.2, handheld

Far left: The high contrast of complementary colours creates a vibrant look, especially when used at full saturation. Manage this colour scheme carefully, as it can be jarring. Canon EOS 5D MkIII with Canon EF 100mm f/2.8 L Macro IS USM lens, ISO 100, 1/400sec at f/2.8, handheld

Left: Purple and yellow sit directly opposite each other on the colour wheel and are a classic colour combination for flowers. Canon EOS 5D MkIII with Canon EF 180mm f/3.5 L Macro USM lens, ISO 200, 1/1600sec at f/3.5, handheld



DEPTH OF FIELD VERSUS FOCAL LENGTH

The central tension at the heart of close-up macro photography is the play between depth of field and focal length. Find how close you can get to the flower, as every lens has a different minimum focusing distance. At close range, this is a testing relationship, as the margin for error is razor-thin. While a large aperture (f/2.8–f/8) gives your background a blurred, ethereal effect, isolating the subject and putting it centre stage, it often means that not enough of your subject is in focus, and the resulting lack of sharpness can spoil the shot. I would always recommend using a fully manual setting to give you complete control, plus selective focusing to make sure the focus point is exactly where you want it. I rarely try to shoot the whole flower in focus, instead composing to get a fairly good plane of focus on the best angle of the flower. I’ll often try a couple of different settings for the same shot, and decide which has worked better when viewing the images on my computer. I prefer to shoot with a wide-open aperture, so sometimes I’ll step back, allowing a bit more distance between myself and the subject to deepen the depth of field. With modern sensors, you can allow for some cropping.

Focus stacking

One way to create an image with a greater depth of field is to focus stack your images. As the name implies, focus stacking is the process of taking several shots of a subject, which are later merged in post-processing software. The result is a single image in which the subject is mostly or completely in focus. Each image is focused on a slightly different part of the flower, so the technique requires a tripod to keep the camera and lens totally still. Images can be stacked in Photoshop or specific focus-stacking software such as Helicon Focus or Zerene Stacker. The images are aligned and the in-focus areas of each of the images are blended together into a single image with amazing depth of field. This is a great way to show incredible detail in a flower and create a dynamic and interesting image.

Tip: Rather than trying to get the whole subject, such as this eryngium seed head, in focus, choose a good plane of focus on the best angle of the flower, while paying equal attention to what is in your background. Canon EOS 5D MkIII with Canon EF 100mm f/2.8 L Macro IS USM lens, ISO 400, 1/200sec at f/3.2, handheld



Below: Good composition can trigger emotional responses from your photography. Isolating this echinacea purple seed head in front of a beautifully coloured, layered background symbolises isolation. Canon EOS 5D MkIII with Canon EF 100mm f/2.8 L Macro IS USM lens, ISO 100, 1/500sec at f/3.2, Manfrotto tripod with joystick head

LOVE YOUR SUBJECT AND BE AN ARTIST

The received wisdom is that we should get the shot right in-camera. While I would generally agree in principle, and no one wants to spend more time editing, I do always shoot knowing there is another very important part of the story to come. I’ll shoot with the post-processing potential in mind. One wonderful aspect of photography is that you have the freedom to create not just what you see, but also what you feel. You don’t have to follow conventions. A flower you are photographing may be colourful, but I may speak more powerfully in black & white – or you might want to adjust the colours. I do most of my editing in Lightroom, and rarely visit Photoshop. But even in Lightroom, the Raw image is just a starting point, a kind of canvas for your work

of art. So make those flower images and then have fun with them.

Finally, back to breaking rules. As I said at the beginning of the feature, I have fallen over and got up a lot, as it was the only method of learning open to me. I have learnt that it’s best to experiment, challenge conventions, take risks and be playful – over time you will develop your own creative juice. Do also get used to spending quite a lot of time in front of the computer, and learn how to edit your work. You can always throw away pictures that just don’t work. I would also strongly advise learning how to quickly identify mediocre shots, and to avoid trying to salvage them in post-processing – you’ll never escape the digital darkness if you don’t!



Below: Pick as perfect a flower specimen as possible. Noticing blemishes and removing cobwebs before you shoot an image can save you hours of reblending. Canon EOS 5D MkIII with Canon EF 24–70mm f/2.8 L II USM lens, ISO 400, 1/250sec at f/2.8, handheld



Below: Apply landscape photography principles, such as leading lines and the rule of thirds, to guide the viewer through an image. Canon EOS 5D MkIII with Canon EF 24–70mm f/2.8 L II USM lens, ISO 800, 1/1000sec at f/10, handheld

TAKE PART! Enter our ‘plants and flowers’ photography competition – turn to page 111 for details

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