

## **Choosing Lenses for Wildflower Photography**

By Bill Black

Several years ago I read an article in *First Light*, a monthly newsletter for nature photographers. The article addressed the use of different lenses for different effects. Since our club will soon be engaging in several field trips, including one intended for wildflower photography; I thought I would share the paraphrased information with you with the publication's permission.

To take home good wildflower images, you can use practically any lens you have in your camera bag, be it a 20mm wide angle, a macro lens or even a lens in the 200mm to 300mm range.

Starting with a wide angle, you can use this to capture a large field of flowers in a variety of styles, all based on camera position. If you get low to the ground and only use the field of flowers, it will allow you to bring the foreground closer to you. By incorporating the sky or a distant mountain peak in the background your foreground material will seem less prominent. No matter which of these techniques you use, you will need to use your camera's preview button or the hyperfocal distance technique to achieve maximum depth of field.

If you happen to own a super-wide or fish-eye lens you can even do more with your wildflower photography. If you are able to get your camera to ground level, you can get beneath a group of flowers and shoot up at the sky to make your flowers appear like trees.

When doing this, you can try different things like having the sun in your image or not. If you incorporate the sun you can then choose to have it hiding behind a petal or flower or showing completely. If you have the sun showing completely in the frame, you will need to underexpose the image by as much as two full stops. By bracketing you can see which one works best when you get your film back. If you place the sun behind a flower, you need to change your bracketing a little bit by going a full stop on either side by a full stop in 1/3-stop increments.

Another thing you can do with a wide-angle lens is to find a cluster of flowers, or even colorful grounds leaves, and fill the frame with the subject since you can get very close to your subject. This portrays the feeling of almost being inside the subject.

Moving up in size to telephoto and mid-range lenses, you can isolate your subject easier than with other lenses. The one problem you run into with using medium telephotos is that your working distance is increased. To obtain closer focus you can use extension tubes.

The advantage with using these lenses is that you can really work with controlling your depth of field and isolate your subject.

Telephoto lenses work best if you have a hillside of flowers and just want to isolate one flower in the field and leave the others out of focus.

Another reason for using a telephoto lens for wildflowers is when a shot you want is a little too far out of range for "normal" or mid-range lenses or there are obstructions between you and your subject. One example of this is if you come across a waterfall with some nice flowers along the edge of it. By using a telephoto lens you can isolate the portion of the waterfall and flowers you want in your composition.

Switching to a macro lens or by using an attachment to allow you to do close-ups lets you capture the details of an individual or small group of flowers. When you do this, your options expand even more.

This type of photography allows you to explore the world many people see but don't really see. Getting close to the flowers lets you see the intricate detail within your subject and imparts an entirely different feeling.

One of the primary things you need to think about when using close-up equipment to shoot flowers is how much depth you need and where do you want the viewer's eye to focus.

When using close-up equipment you have less depth of field than with other lenses, so if the flower you're working has a fair amount of depth to it, you will need to stop down, that is, use a higher numbered f-stop, to get the entire flower in focus. Of course, soft focusing a flower or just a part of a flower is an excellent variation and a pleasant technique.

Tight macro work also allows you to let your creativity come to the fore. By moving tight inside a flower you can focus on colors, shapes and designs within your subject. When you're trying to isolate just a small portion of the flower, you will need to go more than a magnification of 1X to accomplish this. You also need to keep in mind that with the more magnification you use the less depth of field you get, no matter what f-stop you use. To get more depth of field for your shot, you will need to use a flash to bring out any detail beyond where your focus is. But that's a subject for discussion at another time.

The world of flower photography is exciting. It can open new windows to your mind. Experiment. Use a variety of lenses. Employ extreme sharpness, selective focus and soft focus techniques. Have FUN. And good shooting!