



PHOTO: JEANIE SHAFER

Photographing flowers and their friends is best done when there is no wind present.

Discover Beauty Through Photography

Yankton photographer Jeanie Shafer offers tips on how to take great nature photos.

WHERE & HOW?

Know where to find your subject matter. Scope out the area around you. Perhaps your own garden, flowering fields, parks, nature trails or indoor botanical gardens. All of the places to find these small things that need a “second look.” We pass them by all too quickly only to one day discover the treasure that was always there waiting for our camera lenses! So the “how” is to put yourself into a “discovery” mode and not be in a “hurry”!

CAMERAS AND LENSES

I suggest a 35 mm SLR camera as the best tool for the job. Digital equipment is wonderful and the most practical & versatile these days as it becomes increasingly harder if not downright impossible to find a place to develop film. This almost “lost art” is best left to the absolute experts!

The lens best suited for close up photography of our garden friends is done with a macro lens or the macro lens setting on your camera.

A telephoto lens held as close as you can (feet away) can also be used but the results will be different and not as precise as the macro. There are adapters and 2X, 3X converters to add to your regular lens but they do not give you as precise of a result as a dedicated macro lens.

Birds are best photographed with a telephoto as we can not often get very close to them. Striving to keep the head and or especially the eyes and beak of birds as your main focus point when trying for a close up shot gives the best results. When shooting the entire body of a bird or trying to catch it in flight, the aforementioned focus is not usually as critical. Deciding, however, whether or not you want to stop action with a higher shutter speed or depict motion of the subject will be your main concern.

WEATHER CONDITIONS

Photographing our garden flowers, plants and flying, buzzing, garden friends will be much more successful when wind is non existent or very low. Shooting with a macro lens or macro (up close) setting on your camera must definitely be done with NO WIND whatsoever. The very shallow depth of field that exists with a macro setting can make or break your shot if a flower or plant is moving back and forth constantly changing what you may want to feature as your “best in focus” choice.

For instance, I like to try very hard to make the eyes or at least the entire detailed portions of the head of my small subject to be in focus and my “focal point.”

Flowers and plants are much more forgiving if



PHOTO: JEANIE SHAFER

Birds are best photographed with a telephoto lens.

there is no wind because they are not “buzzing” or “fluttering” about.

You can play with these more in seeking your ideal focus.

Not all shots have to be made with a macro lens ... a telephoto lens can be used to still get what you want but keep your distance from ... let’s say ... bees and wasps! The depth of field will be a little different and you may not be able to be as precise but good results are definitely possible if there is, again, little or no wind at all.

For an “overall” shot of a mass of flowers or plants, a general lens or telephoto may be used. In these cases, wind is not quite as critical as even the “motion” of a mass of flowers may be the desired shot. Lower shutter speeds will allow you the effect you want.

And of course a fast shutter speed will “stop” motion completely.

LIGHT CONDITIONS

As in all photography, lighting is a major key element to success. While one can “override” or take full advantage of the existing light conditions by opening or closing the aperture of your lenses, it helps greatly to take advantage of just the right kind of light as often as possible for what you are shooting.

I have found that shooting plants and flowers in early morning, just as the sun is beginning to give good light, and through the next hour has proven successful. Shooting in shade always helps but usually only during late morning to late afternoon when full sunlight is bouncing off of all surfaces giving an “even” tone to the area or subject matter.

Very bright, stark sunlight has proven to be my worst enemy while doing close-up work of flowers and plants.

An overall larger view or a view from a distance

of this subject matter is a different story, but is still not the best light.

The very best light that I have found for plant life is just after it has rained and there is no wind — unless, of course, the clouds have totally parted and stark sun comes through. The still-clouded sky — not dark but illuminated by thin clouds still hanging around — has a completely “magical” effect in light for this type of photography! As often as I can, I run outdoors to capture whatever may be available to shoot during this “premium” light. Not to mention that butterflies and bees enjoy coming out just after a rain.

Another tip on giving your subject matter that fresh, lush look even if it has not just rained is to carry a spray bottle of water along on your photo shoot. While keeping from stark sunlight and finding a shaded spot that works, a little spritz of water does wonders on plants and flower!

The insect world and birds, however, are not fond of being “spritzed”! Just don’t do it ... a little common sense goes a long way!

Back-lighting your subject is always an option. Done correctly, gradations of tonal colors can be achieved when part of your flower or leaf greenery is back-lit. Be careful not to allow the back-lighting to be so bright, however, that it will darken the forefront of your subject; it’s the same common scenario as photographing a person indoors while they are standing in front of a window: Your camera will want to read the greater portion of light filling the lens and the person will be seen as merely a dark shadow while the “outdoors” seen through the window will be crystal clear and perfect! Not at all what you intended. So you must compensate by opening up your aperture a few stops in order to achieve the right result. Taking several shots with different f-stops and shutter speeds will give you at least “one” shot that you prefer as “best.”

A “golden” color can be achieved with the first and last rays of the day’s light.

BE CAREFUL & RESPECTFUL

Lastly but certainly not least ...

Just as with any subject matter that has “life,” a common sense respect for this life should always be a No. 1 priority for us. We don’t trample the flowers and plant life we are shooting. You may often find yourself in an unnatural contortion on your knees, your belly or elbows in order to follow your garden subject matter, but be aware not to bend, break or tear the plant life or agitate butterflies and bees in the process!

Your perfect shot is there ... just be aware, consider the tips given for success, be patient and it will come to you.

Good Luck ... and most of all “have fun”!

Grow Asparagus And Rhubarb In Your Own Garden This Spring

GROWING RHUBARB

BROOKINGS — After a long winter with no fresh home-grown vegetables many gardeners really look forward to that first spring harvest of asparagus and rhubarb, says David Graper SDSU Extension Horticulturist and Director of McCrory Gardens.

“These popular vegetables are actually perennials that come back year after year to provide a bounty of delicious and nutritious food for main meals and desserts,” Graper said. “Many asparagus fanciers take to scouring the road ditches and fence lines for these delectable spring shoots while others chose to establish a patch in their own gardens.”

Graper says the best way to start an asparagus bed is to begin preparation in the fall before the spring you want to plant.

First, kill off all of the weeds with repeated cultivation or an application of glyphosate herbicide. He says this can also be done in the spring, but it won’t be as easy to get the tough perennial weeds controlled.

“Weeds are the biggest problems for asparagus growers so get them taken care of before you begin,” he said.

Then, in early spring, order fresh 1-year old seedling crowns of the variety you want to plant. It is best to always buy seedling crowns rather than to try to dig up plants from a friend or a ditch, they transplant better and you can select an all-male variety which is usually more productive.

Plant by first digging a trench about a foot deep and 8- to 10-inches wide. Place the crowns in the center of the trench — about 18-inches apart and cover with about 3-inches of soil.

Small, new shoots will soon begin to grow. As the new shoots develop, Graper says gardeners can gradually fill in the trench, adding another inch or two of soil every few weeks, until you have the trench completely filled up. Allow the new shoots to grow all season without harvesting for the first two years.

Only cut them back to the ground after they have been killed by a hard freeze in the fall. It’s a good idea to cover the row with a good 3- to 4-inch layer of organic mulch each fall. Shredded leaves and grass clippings work well.

“The mulch will also help reduce weed growth in the patch,” Graper said.

By the third year, he says the asparagus should be getting pretty well established and should be healthy enough to take a couple harvests of the shoots, but then let them grow up and remain until the end of the season again.

In the fourth year, gardeners should be able to harvest for about six weeks. But, stop harvesting if you notice that the size of the shoots is getting smaller, down to the size of a pencil.

Rhubarb is also best planted in the spring in a clean, weed free area. It needs full sun and a well-drained soil. Most people will plant using crown divisions that they purchase from a nursery but, Graper says gardeners can also get a division from a friend.

Work the soil well before planting. Incorporating some compost or well-rotted manure can also help get your plants off to a good start. Dig a large enough hole to easily accommodate the transplant covering the buds with a couple inches of soil. Rhubarb can also be planted from seed in the spring but there are more varieties with the nice red colored petioles or stalks available as transplants than from seed. Also, Graper adds that seed-grown plants tend to produce more seed stalks than the vegetatively produced plants.

Once again, it is best to not harvest anything from your rhubarb for the first two years. In year three, you can harvest a few of the stalks but leave the rest to mature and continue to build up the plants.

When harvesting, Graper encourages gardeners to grasp the leaf stalks close to the ground and give a firm tug to harvest them from the plant. Cut off the large leaf blade and add those to the compost pile which will leave the edible petiole. If seed stalks develop, cut them off close to the base of the plant. Allowing them to develop will take some energy from the plant so it is best to remove them.

WEED CONTROL

Weeds are the biggest problem with growing these perennial crops. Graper says gardeners can hoe or till right over an established asparagus patch in the spring before the new shoots start to grow. Or, one can carefully apply glyphosate herbicide to perennial weeds before new shoots emerge in the spring too.

“But do not get the spray on any asparagus shoots as this can severely damage the plants,” he said.

A good layer of mulch and keeping a clean border around the plants is the best way to avoid weed problems. Do not use salt to kill weeds. While this may kill the weeds it is also damaging to the asparagus.

Both asparagus and rhubarb will benefit from a yearly application of fertilizer after harvest is complete. Gardeners can use a typical garden fertilizer like 10-10-10 applying about a cup per 10-foot of row and scratching this into the soil or you can use compost or well-rotted manure, applying it an inch or two thick over and around the plants. But be aware that you might be introducing weed seeds to your patch which will mean more weeding later.

To learn more, visit iGrow.org/Gardens.

Weed Patch

A Long Month Comes To An End

BY LINDA WUEBBEN
P&D Correspondent

February is a long month. If I was texting, I would exaggerate the long with lots of Os but I don’t think my editor will print it that way. February has the shortest number of days of any month but drags on the longest sometimes with gloomy days, colder weather and lots of wind. The calendar page just doesn’t seem to want to change.

The anticipation of warm and sunny springtime days, light breezes and early visits to a garden plot seem just around the corner. Seed catalogs slip into my house with the mail and the summer dreaming starts. Instead of stars or sugar plums, I see tomatoes, cucumbers, fresh garden lettuce circling in my head. Oh, sweet corn, too. Bob sees radishes and sweet potatoes but it will be while yet before any of that happens.

February is a long month. The dry weather makes me sad and the continuing drought situation is certainly depressing. By the weekend a drought buster may have moved through our area. A late winter storm would do the trick; break up the dry weather pattern but I’m not getting my hopes up. I had fog scratched quite frequently the first part of February and we got little skiffs of snow to match most of those dates but I don’t have any fog marked on my calendar for the next few weeks; actually not until March 8. Maybe Mother Nature will decide to turn the tables.



Linda WUEBBEN

be outside and calculating how long before it would be a regular occurrence again. Was that just at the start of February?

February is a long month. I have struggled through the income and expenses of 2012 and met with our accountant. I have done a little house cleaning here and there, cleared out my china hutch and eliminated crap. I did the same with the closets. I moved a dresser, threw one out of the basement, thought about moving the TV and noticed a glass curio cabinet I wanted at a thrift store. Yep, you’re right. I’m driving Bob crazy. Whenever I walk out of my small office space/sewing room and say to Bob, “I’ve been thinking ...,” he groans either not again or that’s not good.

February is a long month. Lent has started and that is good. I have always found I really set goals for myself during Lent rather than at the start of the New Year. I have also learned over the years, deprivation is not the way to go for me. I always go back to my

old bad habits after Lent is over. I try to find new, improved, healthier, prayerful, or beneficial avenues to pursue. Gee, I sound like a diet commercial. There’s a lot of those on TV now in February, too.

February is a long month. My brother and wife traveled to Florida in February a couple years for just that reason. They agreed the change of scenery and warm climate perked them up and helped them make it through March. March is a long month, too, but it never seems as long as February. Easter is always just around the corner in March, either at the end of the month or early in April. Potatoes can be planted and real gardening decisions can be made. Summer is almost a reality. But not in February.

February is a long month. Soon Bob and I will be heading out on the calibrating trail. We already have a training session for some new trainees scheduled for Friday but it will probably be postponed now with the weather. Farmers aren’t in the planting mood yet and planters are buried deep in the steel shed. I remember one place we went two years ago. The planter was in a shed in the middle of a small pasture and it had a moat. Yep, water and cows circled it. If we didn’t have a four-wheel drive, we couldn’t go there. Last year, we calibrated planters on 90 degree days and it wasn’t even May yet. It’s only February; the real work won’t start for a while.

As I write this, only eight days are left but I still feel the same.

February is a long month.

Online Training Available For Youth School Garden Programs

BROOKINGS — Interested in using a garden to teach children? SDSU Extension is offering a series of Webinars for those working with educational teaching gardens. School teachers, afterschool and summer garden program leaders and helpers are all encouraged to participate in the “Youth in the Garden Webinars.”

Webinars are scheduled for the second Wednesday of the month. The next session will be held March 13, running from 10-10:30 a.m. CST. To participate in the Webinar, visit www.iGrow.org/events and click the link within the event posting. Participants are encouraged to log in within 15 minutes of the specified time.

The program “Getting Those Seeds and Plants in the Ground Correctly,” presented by Mary Roduner, Consumer Horticulture Field Specialist, will discuss how to properly plant seeds and transplants and watering and fertilizing

the garden.

Save the date for this upcoming sessions:

- April 10, 10 to 10:30 a.m. CST: “Selecting Appropriate Varieties for the Garden,” presented by Amanda Bachmann, Consumer Horticulture Field Specialist.
- May 8, 10-10:30 a.m. CST: “Vegetable Diseases,” presented by Mary Roduner, Consumer Horticulture Field Specialist and “Growing a Container Salsa Garden with Youth,” presented by Ann Schwader, Nutrition Field Specialist.

If you would like to receive more information on trainings and funding opportunities related to youth gardening programs or to exchanging questions and ideas with others involved in similar projects, e-mail Chris.Zdorovtsov@sdstate.edu to be added to the SDSU Youth Gardening LISTSERV.

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