

How to use reflectors and diffusers

As much as we all love the sun, it can be a burden when trying to capture the perfect outdoor shot. Garden photography expert Paul Debois gives his top tips on best harnessing the elements

I'm asked all the time how to take beautiful photographs. It's rarely a secret, and more often than not simply a case of making the best use of the conditions you happen to be working in. In this instance, I'm going to show you how to take a flower portrait in bright summer sun. A clear, blue sky in the summer, with the sun directly overhead, is usually a problem in garden photography. In fact, it is a real nuisance.

You will need a tripod, a reflector and a diffuser to try this exercise. These you can buy at almost any photographic retailer, but you can make them yourself. I have a large sheet of nylon curtain material (with no patterns) I sometimes use as a diffuser, which can be suspended over the subject. In this case, it doesn't need to be big as it only needs to cast shade over one small flower head. Likewise with the reflector, an A4 piece of silver foil (scrunched up and reopened) can be used. Or even a white sheet of paper, depending on how much fill you need.



WHAT YOU NEED

Reflectors and diffusers can be shop-bought or quite easily made at home. White card, foam board and silver foil can be transformed into reflectors, while diffusers can be fashioned from large sheets of pattern-free curtain material.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Freelance since 1988, Paul Debois has exhibited regularly at shows such as the International Garden Photographer of the Year (IGPOTY) and the Affordable Art Fair. He regularly gives workshops on garden photography for The RPS, and in 2013 became an IGPOTY judge.

FINE ADJUSTMENTS FOR THE PERFECT SHOT



Avoid distractions

1 I used a 200mm lens with extension tubes. For shots 2-4, the camera was on a tripod. The lens at f/2.8 blows the background out of focus. The main distraction is the hoverfly, plus the unsympathetic light.



Position precision

2 The fly has moved (I often use a make-up brush to clean off insects, pollen etc) and the camera position changed to remove the bottom-left flower. But the sun was fully out, creating unsightly shadows.



Room for reflection

3 A small silver reflector was used out of frame, bottom left, to illuminate the flower. Shadows have been reduced, but the image is still a bit stark as it's in direct sunlight. An acceptable image, but it can be improved.



Red dawn

4 An alternative to a diffuser is to wait for a cloud to cover the sun. The reflector was still in place, with the background in shade, and less dominant. Also, the colour temperature is bluer, emphasizing the reds.



PLANT & GARDEN WORKSHOP

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