

Beginners' Guide to

digital photography



Part 6: Take a Closer Look

A Closer Look
at Macro

A Closer Look
at Still Life

part six



A Closer Look at Macro

True 'macro' refers to any photographic situation where you are working at a 1:1 ratio or closer, thereby creating an image which is equal or larger in size than the subject being photographed. Anything further away than this is referred to as 'close-up photography'. Although subjects for macro can be numerous, some of the most popular can be found outdoors in the form of insects and flora.

If you are serious about macro photography you should consider investing in a DSLR that can accommodate purpose built macro lenses and shutter release cables. While these are costly investments, they are essential to good quality macro work.

Macro lenses are essentially normal lenses that allow you to rack out the front element quite far from the image sensor. The most popular focal lengths are 55 and 105mm. Since they are specifically designed for macro work, macro lenses offer the best results at these lengths.

Another option is to use extension tubes, which work on the same principle by moving the lens away from the image sensor and increasing magnification. Extension tubes are less expensive than macro lenses and usually a bit tricky as they reduce the amount of light allowed through and adjustments need to be made to compensate in order to achieve good exposure.

If you have a compact camera, there is likely to be a macro mode, usually identified by a flower icon.

In this mode, the camera will allow you to focus on items closer to the lens than normal, and although the distance will vary depending on the camera, in most cases it won't be true 'macro'. In macro

mode the camera will automatically close down the aperture so that your subject is in full focus.

When auto focusing, your camera will usually tell you it's focused by the sounding of a small beep. If you are not hearing this, you may be too close to the subject for your camera, and the resulting image will be blurred. Instead, select a lossless file format such as Tiff and move back a bit further. You'll have a bit more unwanted detail in your image but by storing images as tiff files rather than jpegs you have more data to start with and so can afford to crop the image later without losing too much resolution.

When your lens is fully extended and very close to your subject, even the slightest movement can cause blurring so always mount your camera on a tripod. A shutter release cable is also recommended as even pressing the shutter button can sometimes cause enough movement to ruin an image. If you have a compact camera you can use the self timer to achieve similar results.

One useful feature that some cameras offer is a depth of field preview. It can be particularly handy in macro work as it allows you to check what parts of your subject will be in focus and what parts are not. You can then keep adjusting your settings until you are happy with the results.

If you are having trouble achieving the desired depth of field in automatic mode, try flicking over to manual control as this generally allows you an extra stop or two of exposure. If you are shooting in very bright light and still cannot achieve the desired depth of field, try using a neutral density filter. >





A Closer Look at Life

When photographing an insect or living creature you will have a better chance of it hanging around if your camera is not making a lot of focus and shutter noises or flash firing. I highly recommend you switch your camera to silent and turn off the flash. If you require a bit of extra light, use a small reflector or small piece of white or silver cardboard to bounce the extra light onto your subject.

When photographing anything that has eyes, always use them as your focus point. When viewing an image, our eyes are automatically drawn to the eyes so it's important that they remain in sharp focus.

As mentioned before, it's best to shoot macro with your camera on a tripod, however sometimes you just don't have time to get set up before the subject moves away or flies off.

If you can get a good bracing for your camera try firing off a series of quick shots in succession before you set up the tripod. This trick doesn't always work, but generally there will



be at least one fairly sharp image amongst the lot. Once you have fired off a few quick shots, if the subject is still hanging around, take your time to adjust your tripod and see what you can achieve. If your subject does happen to fly off before you're ready at least you have something.





A Closer Look at Still Life

Photographing objects such as flowers and fungi allow you a little more time to set up your shots and you can use a little fill flash without worrying about startling your subject. If your flash is too harsh, try defusing it by placing a bit of tissue paper over the top. Experiment with different methods of lighting to see which results in more pleasing effect.

Remember to apply the basic rules of composition. Make sure your image has a main point of interest and place it in a pleasing position within frame and keep your image simple and 'clean'.

Another handy tip when photographing flowers is to take along a small spray bottle of water. A few light sprays over the petals will give your

flower a few nice beads to add interest.

Early morning light is usually perfect for photographing delicate flora or even spider webs but be warned, even the slightest breeze will disturb your subject, and for this reason I suggest you to bring along a piece of cardboard or something that can serve as a bit of a wind break to help still your subject.

When photographing nature, it is important that you don't damage or harm your subject or the surrounding environment. By all means enjoy and record your scene but leave it as you found it for someone else to enjoy.



Put Your Best Image Forward

Email us the best macro or close up pic that you've taken. Files should be approx 1MB and received before deadline of 5pm Thursday. Entries can be emailed to photo@dailyexaminer.com.au.

The best images will appear in the next instalment of

Beginners' Guide to Digital Photography, published on Monday 28th March.

Prize for the best image each week will be a 7" Digital Photo Frame. All photographs appearing in the paper will win the photographer 50 free 6x4 prints in store at Harvey

Norman Grafton.

At the end of the course, the best image will win the photographer a Panasonic Digital SLR twin lens camera Kit (DMC-G10KTWIN) VALUED AT \$900.00.

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