

Macro Photography Workshops

The following advice will help you prepare for your macro photography workshop. You don't need to buy any of the discussed equipment, but I highly recommend bringing either a macro lens, close-up filters for your telephoto lens or extension tubes.

Macro Lens

I recommend using a 105mm or longer macro lens for this workshop. If you don't own one and don't want to buy one, then consider buying macro diopters or extension tubes.



Close-up Filters (Macro Diopters)

If you don't have a macro lens or don't want to buy one just yet, then you can use close-up filters, also known as macro diopters. Here's a link to an Amazon search for these filters: <http://amzn.to/1EEhYZA> Close-up filters screw onto the end of a lens and help the lens focus closer. Combining close-up filters and a 55-200mm or a 70-300mm lens can create a serviceable macro lens. When ordering a close-up filter make sure the thread size matches the threads on your lens. If you plan on doing lots of macro photography, you'll be happier with a 105mm or 200mm macro lens.



Extension Tubes

You could also select extension tubes. Extension tubes change the minimum focusing distance of your lens, which allows the lens to get closer to your subject. This can turn a 55-200mm, 70-200 or 70-300mm lens into a serviceable macro lens. Not all extension tubes are created equal. Make sure the brand you buy allows autofocus and electronic communication between the camera and your lens.

Here's a link to an Amazon search for these filters: <http://amzn.to/1G7r2NP>

Should I Buy Close-up Filters or Extension Tubes?

Either approach will work, but the close-up filter approach is easier to learn. If you buy a high-end close-up filter, the results are typically good. Extension tubes are harder to learn, but often provide a better result than a close-up filter.

Camera

Before you come to the workshop, check your manual to see if your camera can do double exposures. If it can, please, take the time to figure out how to do it. One technique that I'll teach uses double exposures. If your camera doesn't do double exposures, there is a way to recreate the technique using the photoshop.



Light Diffusion: Umbrella, Scrim or Plastic

Making macro images on a bright sunny day is difficult. A white photography umbrella, like you'd use for portraits, helps block the sun and lets just enough diffused light into the photo to give a nice soft glow. I carry a Wescott 32-inch umbrella with me for macro. Here's a link to it at Amazon:

<http://amzn.to/1EEiJw>

Instead of an umbrella, you can use any scrim-like material, such as the translucent part of this reflector: <http://amzn.to/1LO2B6T>

For a budget option, consider using Visqueen, a brand of polyethylene plastic sheeting used in housing construction. Often contractors will have left over Visqueen they will give you for free. Look the opaque, 6-mill style. I like to use a big enough piece to cover the subject and camera.



Tripod for Macro

When buying a tripod, consider a tripod without a center column. This allows you to get the tripod low to the ground. A better option is a tripod that features a column that can be turned parallel to the ground. This provides much more flexibility.



Beanbag

A beanbag allows you to set your camera almost completely on the ground and helps provide stability on uneven grounds. My favorite is the Kinesis SafariSack. You can get the SafariSack with plastic bead filling or filled with buckwheat. Although much heavier, I prefer the plastic bead filling. Here's a link to the SafariSack at Amazon: <http://amzn.to/2nBbLQq> The SafariSack also works great when balancing your lens out of your car window to shoot wildlife.

Flash and Flash Brackets

Using an off-camera flash for macro photography can help you get pictures when it's windy and it also can help you handhold a camera to get into a tricky location. Flashes aren't necessary, but if you have one it consider bringing it.

To use a flash effectively, you need to get it off your camera. You'll need a few items such as a TTL Flash Cord and a flash bracket. You can pay a lot of money for a flash bracket, but if you're willing to cobble together a bracket from parts, you can make a nice butterfly bracket for a fraction of the

price that the dedicated brackets cost. For approximately \$30, you can build your own butterfly bracket. Here's what you need:

- Run Shuangyu Heavy Duty Photography L Bracket – Amazon.com link: <http://amzn.to/2nBez02> \$10
- Lonker Dual Flash Bracket Tripod Mount – Amazon.com link: <http://amzn.to/2nhQbxb> \$9
- AKOAK 1/4" Swivel Mini Ball Head – Amazon.com link: <http://amzn.to/2ocfQMn> \$6
- Fotasy SCX2 1/4-Inch 20 Tripod Screw to Hot Shoe Adapter – Amazon.com link: <http://amzn.to/2nMXsIX> \$7
- Nuts and bolts as needed to put everything together



5:1 Reflector

A reflector allows you to bounce light back onto your subject when it is under an umbrella or scrim. You can buy a big studio-sized reflector like that shown in the above photo or you can buy something more portable. I like a reflector that is about 20 inches. The Etekcity 24" 5-in-1 Portable Multi-Disc Collapsible Photography Photo Reflector is an ideal reflector for macro photography. Amazon.com link: <http://amzn.to/2nBhZ2M>

Miscellaneous Equipment

If you have extra clothespins or small spring clamps around, bring some along. These can help hold plants out of the way while you shoot your flower. Ideally, we don't want to harm any plants while photographing our subjects, and clothespins help us Leave No Trace.

A small, soft paint brush or makeup brush can be useful if you need to clean and dirt off your subject.

Use a spray bottle to add water droplets to your subjects. This gives them that morning dew look that looks great in shots.

If you really want to be geeky, bring along an 8x10 or 8x12 matt photo of a blurred forest, grassland or something with uniform color. You can hold these photos behind your subject and get a beautiful blurred background while maintaining significant depth of field in your subject.

Macro Specific Equipment List

This is in addition to the other equipment. You don't need all this equipment, but I highly recommend either a macro lens, close-up filters or extension tubes.

- Macro lens
- Close-up Filter
- Extension tubes
- Flash bracket
- Flash
- Flash cord
- 8x10 or 8x12 matt pictures of blurred backgrounds
- 5:1 reflector
- Clothespins or clamps
- Soft brush
- Spray bottle