

PHOTOGRAPHING FLOWERS

By L. W. BROWNELL

THERE are two ways in which flowers may be photographed, cut and growing. Both ways are useful—the former in showing the details of the bloom itself, and the latter in depicting the manner of growth of the plant. To those who wish an occupation full of pleasure, that will take them to the very heart of nature. I can offer no better advice than to take their camera and search out the wild flowers in their haunts and then photograph them.

A long-focus camera is, of course, necessary and a lens of a reasonable depth of field. The fast or medium isochromatic plates should always be used, and when it is possible to employ the color screen it is always best to do so. To do this, however, except with such sturdy plants as will not be moved by every passing breeze, largely increases the chances of failure; for it is remarkable what a slight breath of air will cause most growing plants to sway. So I rarely attempt to use the screen except on the very calmest days.

The plants which are chosen to be photographed should never be disturbed in any way, but allowed to remain in exactly the original position of their growth. Nature is generally much more artistic in the groupings of her flowers than man can ever hope to be, and therefore we should never try to improve upon her arrangement of them. It may sometimes be found necessary to remove some few of the leaves or even the flowers themselves, that are somewhat in front of the main group, in order that they may not be so near the camera as to be out of focus. This should always be done with extreme care, that no evidences of their having been removed may show in the photograph, and it should never be done except when absolutely necessary.

Always have the camera as nearly on a level with the subject as possible; that is, do not point it downward any more than can be helped. In order to escape doing this I have frequently placed my camera flat upon the ground, holding it firm by sticks driven into the ground upon either side of it. Of course, this makes the process of focusing rather awkward, especially if the flowers are growing in a damp spot, but it gives a correct view of them. When the camera must be tilted, use the swing back to obviate distortion.

Always focus upon that particular flower of the group that is nearest to the camera, and then stop down the lens until all are in sharp focus. This sometimes necessitates a long exposure, but that cannot be helped, and we must take the chances of a breeze moving our subjects in the meantime.

The size of the image on the plates must depend entirely upon the wishes of the

operator. I am in favor of making it a fair size, but enough of the surroundings should show to give one an idea, when looking at the picture, in what kind of a locality the flowers were growing. Always photograph the entire plant.

Flowers should never be photographed in the direct sunlight, as this causes too great a contrast of light and shadow. If they are not already in the shade, then they must be shaded by the operator holding up a focusing cloth, or his coat, between them and the sun.

In photographing cut specimens the greatest difficulty with which one has to contend is the fact that they so easily wilt. To obviate this they should be picked and arranged (and I have found bottles the best receptacles in which to group them) some hours before photographing them.

In their arrangement one has the chance to display whatever of artistic ability he may possess, and depending upon whether he has much or little rests the fate of the picture, whether it be good or bad.

The work should be done in a building that is least liable to be jarred, for even the walking of a person across the floor will cause the flowers to vibrate sufficiently to spoil all sharpness of detail.

The work should be done by a window having a steady light, and that light equalized on both sides of the flower by the use of white reflecting screens. The background may be either black, white or a neutral tint, as the operator pleases. I keep all three, and use whichever I think will show off the particular flower I am about to photograph to best advantage and give the best effect.

Do not place the flowers too close to the window and well to one side, so that the light may fall upon them as full as possible. Place the background well back from the subject, so that its texture may not show in the photograph.

The slow isochromatic plate in conjunction with the color screen should be used in this work, as it gives absolutely the best tone values, and the necessary length of exposure can here be given without undue fear of the subject moving.

It is always well to use a good-sized plate in this work, and I should advise nothing smaller than a 6 1-2 x 8 1-2 camera.

Always stop down the lens sufficiently to bring everything into sharp focus. I almost invariably use the smallest stop, for that is sure to give the best results in delicacy and sharpness of detail. Always do the focusing with the color screen in place.

One should learn to know his light, so as to time exposures correctly, for only an accurately timed plate will give to a print that delicacy which is the chief charm of a flower photograph.