Photographing the Seasons

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This program will provide ideas and projects to help you make pictures that capture the essence of each season. Although each season provides very different and distinct photo opportunities, the techniques and skills we will cover in this session and on these handouts can easily be used during each season.

Spring

Wildflowers (or just flowers)
Wildflowers provide an excellent opportunity and a creative photographic challenge. Here are a few tips that should help.

- Get close. Close-up filters or a macro lens will help you to get close to your subject and allow you to fill the frame with the flowers.
- Carefully focus. The closer you are to your subject the smaller the area in focus. A tripod will allow you to use a slower shutter speed and smaller aperture for maximum depth of field. If you don't have access to a tripod, use 400 ISO film.
- Watch for movement by the flowers. Even a slight breeze can cause the flowers to move during the exposure and your image will not look sharp.
- Observe and manipulate the light. Create diffuse light simply by using something to block the sunlight (umbrella, cardboard, yourself). Diffuse light (no shadows) is an excellent, even and "easy" light for making wildflower photographs. Then try to add light by using a reflector - a small mirror of bright white mat board work well.

Upside down image
- Make a photograph by lying upside down on your back. This will allow you to get very low and also provide a different perspective. Although the image will be made upside-down, simply reverse it when you display it.

Documenting growth
- Document its growth by creating a series of photographs that shows how the flower changes as it grows.

Table top still life
- Using spring flowers (tulips are great for this), design a tabletop still life to photograph. This is a great opportunity to "play" with light. Try using reflectors, window light, flashlights, or some combination of all of them.

Photograph fruit trees in bloom
- A telephoto lens will allow you to compress and flatten the image. Or use a wide-angle lens and lay on your back under the tree photographing into the sun. Place the sun behind a branch or blossom(s) and the blossoms will become translucent. Backlight, in general, is great for photographing blossoms.

Summer

Most of us make the majority of our photographs during the summer. Summer provides us with long days, plenty of activities, and many photo opportunities. Below are a few suggestions to help you capture the essence of summer.

A day at the beach or lake

- The next time you are with friends or family at a lake or beach, bring your camera and your creative mind. Plan to spend part of the day documenting the activities. Use an entire roll of film capturing the candid moments while others enjoy the leisure pace of a summer day. Watch carefully for those moments when the composition, light and "gesture" come together. Think like a journalist; imagine your assignment is to make one image that oozes summer. Practice by posing your friends or having them do specific activities, such as, jumping off a diving board at sunset, eating corn on the cob or s-mores, pretending to catch a huge fish, but also be ready to respond to that perfect moment.

- A telephoto zoom lens (35 - 105mm) will provide you the most flexibility.
- Don't overburden yourself with camera gear. Keep it simple and light - one camera and one lens.
- If it's a bright sunny day, 100 or 200 ISO film will be the best choice.
- Don't hesitate to use your built-in camera flash. Sunlight directly overhead will create deep shadows under the eyes and hats. The flash can fill in these areas.
- Polarizing filters are great for summer scenic images - they increase color saturation and contrast in blue skies. Because of the increase in contrast, they are not good for photographing people.

Prairie at sunrise

- Arise early and head off to your local prairie before sunrise. There you'll find many interesting images including spider webs covered with dew. To photograph them, get low and shoot towards the light. Focus carefully and try to have the web parallel to the front of your lens, which will help keep the entire web in focus. Be careful to not include a background element that distracts.

Limitless limits

- Cut a piece of string or thin rope approximately 30 feet long then head out to your favorite woods. Tie one end of the string to any tree and the other to your camera strap. Now spend and hour or so making 24 photographs in the confined area. At first you might think how can I make 24 good photographs in such a small area, but after you start looking closely you'll discover that you are surrounded by exciting opportunities.

Campfire

- Photograph your friends cooking marshmallows around a campfire. You'll need a tripod because the shutter speeds will be long and difficult to handhold and you won't want to use your flash as the primary light source. The fire will provide a wonderful glowing red cast to the scene.

Autumn

Autumn provides amazing opportunities for photography – rich vibrant colors, clear skies, and lots of interesting and photogenic activities.

The expansive landscape

- Autumn wide-angle landscape photographs can be particularly compelling. To create outstanding landscapes there are a couple of important considerations. Wide-angle landscapes need something in the foreground to provide a sense of size and perspective and depth to the image. Elements in the foreground usually look best when they are in focus. Polarizing filters will increase the saturation of fall foliage colors. Keep horizon lines out of the center. See Rule of Thirds.

Bird migration

- There are many places in Wisconsin to photograph fall bird migrations. Here are a couple of helpful suggestions to make great images. Sandhill cranes, geese, and ducks are very active just before sundown. Position yourself so that the birds are between you and the setting sun. Meter an area of the sky just away from the sun itself and chose a shutter speed (1/125 or faster) that will stop the birds in flight. I've found it helpful to use a long telephoto lens (80-200 mm).

Harvest

- Spend a late afternoon photographing a harvest. Imagine that you were asked to create a photo-story for a local paper. What kinds of images might you include?

Harvest moon

- Full moons in October always seem huge as they rise above the eastern horizon. They also seem to rise just as the sun is setting. This timing provides a very compelling and challenging photographic opportunity. Unfortunately, it also means compromising since it's more or less impossible to have the moon and the foreground properly exposed at the same time. The moon is reflected sunlight, very bright and surrounded by a dark sky. These extremes will fool the camera's exposure meter and in most cases you'll get a bright white round disk. To make a photograph of the moon with detail you'll need to manually set your camera to an exposure that is more in line with a daylight reading (remember the moon is reflected sunlight) by using the Sunny 16 Rule (see below). If you meter the foreground, it will be exposed properly but the moon will again be a round white disk which is really not so bad. The best way to make this image is to do a double exposure. In other words two different images on one frame of film. Many modern cameras make this very simple. If yours does, use the Sunny 16 Rule to make an exposure for the moon and then recompose and make an image of the foreground.

- The Sunny 16 Rule is quite simple. Set your shutter speed to the number closest to the film's ASA or ISO. For example, if you're using 100 ISO film, set your shutter speed to 1/125 of a second and your f/stop (aperture) to f/l6 (that's were the 16 comes in). Of course you can set it to other equal exposures such as 1/250 at f/11 or 1/500 at f/8 or 1/1000 at f/5.6.

Winter

Winter provides a few challenges to consider before ever leaving the house.

- Make sure you have fresh new camera batteries. Batteries fade very quickly in the cold. If you're going to be out in the cold for a long time, remove the batteries from the camera and keep them in a pocket until you need them. They'll last much longer.
- Once your camera has been outside for a while, be careful not to return it to a warm moist environment quickly. If you do, you risk condensation on both inside and outside components. This can severely damage the electronics.
- In extreme cold, film can become very brittle so use caution rewinding.
- If you are photographing while it is snowing, protect your equipment much like you would during rain. I always keep a small trash bag with my camera gear and have also discovered that a plastic shower cap works perfectly.

Once you're outside winter provides many great possibilities.

Animal tracks in fresh fallen snow

- Carefully compose the tracks so that they lead the viewer into the image. If you can, select an aperture (small hole, large number) that will give you plenty of depth of field (focus).

Icicles

- Try photographing them backlit by the sun. Include the sun and set the aperture to the smallest possible (f/16 or f/22) and you might get a "starburst" effect of the sun.

Winter Moonscape

- On a full moon night, dress warm, grab your watch and flashlight and head out with your camera mounted on a tripod. Note: Moonscapes are not exact science - think of them as a time to play and you'll be happy with your results. You'll need a tripod because the shutter speeds will be to slow to hand hold and may last as long as several minutes. The watch will serve as your timer for long exposures and the flashlight will allow you to see adjustments that you'll need to make. Although it's difficult to make an exact exposure reading, start by setting your aperture at f/4 (fairly open) and your shutter speed at 30 seconds. Longer shutter speed times will require you to use the bulb position (usually noted by a "B"), where the shutter stays open as long as you hold the release. Cable releases help with long exposure times. The images you make will actually look much like daylight images, only with an eerie glow. They can be particularly fascinating.

Note: Making photos that include snow can cause exposure problems. Generally exposure meters will underexpose a snow scene. So you will need to increase the amount of light that enters the camera to make an exposure. The simplest way to do this is to use your exposure compensation adjustment to overexpose the scene by 1 or 2 stops (+1 or +2). You can also do this by opening up your f/stop by 1 or 2 stops or slowing the shutter speed by 1 or 2 stops.


#1


#2


#3


#4


#5


#6


#7


#8


#9


#10