

**My Backyard**  
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July and August are my least favorite months of the year for photographing. The light is high for much of the day, the greens of the forests aren't vivid, streams turn to trickles, and the variety of colorful wildflowers in my region dwindle to only a few. So what is there to do?



*Under the petal detail*

In my case, I shoot in my backyard a lot. A backyard can be a bonanza; whether you have bushes, flowerbeds, a field of grass, or whatever, there is always something to find and shoot. It may not be glamorous shooting but you will certainly train your eye to see things more critically.

In the summer, I have a few stands of Black Eyed-Susans that I photograph. On several mornings throughout the week, I get up around 5:15-5:30 am, have a cup of coffee (or two), then take my camera, a lens and tripod out to the backyard and spend about a half-hour creating images.

When I go out, I tend to take only one lens as an exercise in discipline. I like to see how far I can push my imagination with the focal length I've chosen. The lens I use the most is my 100mm macro. This allows me a host of options when shooting. Whether capturing critters hanging underneath a flower or trying to reveal intimate lines of grace within the flower, the 100mm macro affords me great flexibility.

Working one lens at a time per session, I make it a point to eventually make use of all the lenses in my bag. With long zooms, I like to create "shoot throughs." Shoot throughs are when you place objects in front of the lens or in the way of the lens so it causes a blur in the image when focusing on the main subject. This kind of shot can create interesting, close results. To maximize the effect, I use shallow depths of field in the range of  $f/2.8$  to  $f/5.6$ .



*Shoot through*

I also like to experiment with the Lensbaby. This limited bellow lens can really distort the world. One can vary the depth of field and create some funky perspectives. It's a lens that makes you work hard for the image. The focusing rails on the latest rendition allow for fine focusing, which is crucial, especially when using wide-open apertures. I personally like to include several elements so that when I distort a portion of the frame, the effect is noticeable.



*Lensbaby*

A wide-angle lens isn't the first lens one might think of when shooting in tight quarters. But a wide-angle lens with an extension tube can make for attention-grabbing pictures. I've found that having near-to-far subjects like flower and sky really make the wide angle produce some unique perspectives. Also, getting very low and shooting up can create a few head turning pictures - the wider the lens, the more wild the look. For me, this approach is the most challenging.

Lastly, I break out the old film camera. Since my current digital camera does not allow me to do multiple exposures, I will load a roll of film and look to create a variety of abstracts. When revisiting film, I begin to realize how quickly digital has let me get away from certain aspects of metering. I have found that digital-RAW format leaves a lot more latitude for under- and overexposing. Slide film is not so forgiving, plus there is no histogram or playback to rely on and/or evaluate. So, when I break out the film camera, I have to recall fine metering skills to capture the image correctly, right in the moment! I personally like shooting in this manner from time to time. It helps keep me sharp.



*Curve of a Black Eyed-Susan petal*

Every approach yields different and rewarding images. By continually revisiting the same subjects, I feel it helps sharpen the mind in looking for unusual and creative images. The challenge is great. Some mornings I walk away extremely satisfied with my efforts. Other mornings I've walked away scratching my head as to why I couldn't see a blessed thing. Regardless of the immediate results, the long-term goal with an exercise like this is to constantly push myself in new directions; to find the subtlety of the moment in a single area.

The backyard is a powerful place. It can be a great training ground to aid in the growth of not only your photography, but in your creative horizons. Pushing yourself to improve and demanding more of your talent is the only way one can climb the ladder to become a more successful artist. Take the time to check out your backyard. You may see that it provides the kind of challenges that will help you become a better photographer and a better artist.



Brien Szabo is a nature and travel photographer and teaches photography in both the field and classroom. Next to his family, photography, television production and writing are his passions in life. To see more of Brien's work please visit his website at [www.natureimages321.com](http://www.natureimages321.com).

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