

Capturing Nature with a Smartphone

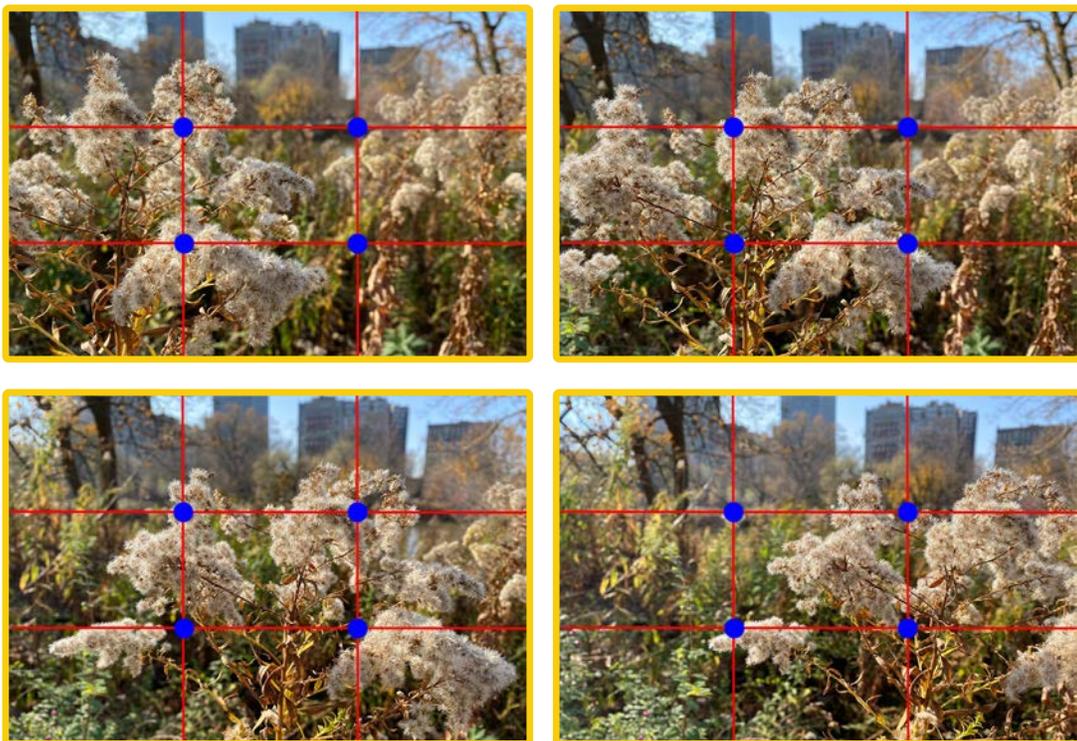
Photography is an amazing and rewarding way to connect with nature and the world around you. And you don't need a fancy camera to take great nature photos! Chances are good that you've already got a great camera at your fingertips. Smartphone and tablet cameras have gotten so good that many smartphone photos are actually much clearer and better quality than the average point-and-shoot camera. We've got some tips to help you take great nature photos with your smartphone.

Tip #1: There is no right or wrong in nature photography.

Nature photography is a huge category of work – it can be anything from a close up picture of a flower to wildlife or landscapes; it can be a single fall leaf or the entire ground covered in leaves; it can be a sunrise or even as simple as a puddle. There is no right or wrong when it comes to the beauty of nature and there is so much to draw inspiration from, so start by exploring what inspires you.

Tip #2: Try shooting photos with the rule of thirds.

The rule of thirds is a way to visualize the composition of your photo as you are shooting it. Picture your image being split into nine equal blocks forming a three-by-three grid. If you follow the rule of thirds, you're aiming to get the most interesting parts of your picture, or the parts that you want to draw most attention to, near the corners where the imaginary grid lines meet. Generally, this rule gives pictures a more natural feeling and helps your eye move through the picture. It also tends to make them more interesting and less symmetrical. Take a look at the photos below. They're all of the same plant, but the composition is very different in each, and gives the photo a very different feel. Which one appeals to you the most? Try using a similar composition when taking your own photos!



Don't worry too much about getting it perfect on your first try. You can always make adjustments and crop your photo when editing.

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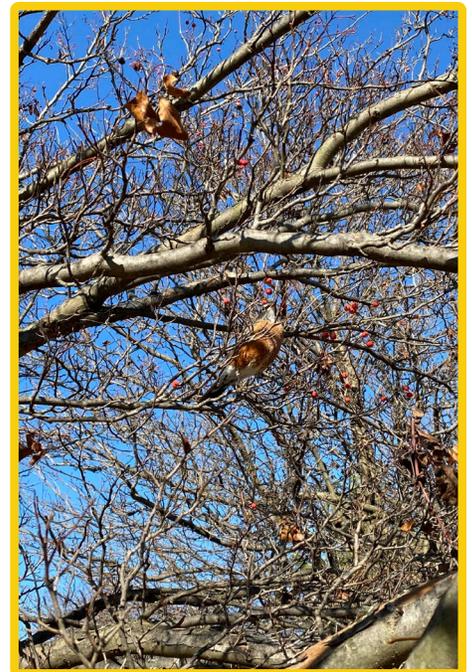
Tip #3: Use natural lighting whenever possible.

Using the built-in flash can often result in harsh and unevenly lit photos. Whenever possible, let the sun, room lighting, and other natural lighting do the work for you. Flashes can also be upsetting or irritating to wildlife and other animals, so it's a good rule of thumb to turn off your flash whenever you can. If you find yourself shooting in low light, you can set your phone on a table, on a fence, or on a small tripod to help stabilize your shot and prevent your picture from turning out blurry.

Don't let cloudy days scare you away either. Overcast days actually offer some of the best natural light conditions, especially for getting close-up pictures of plants, flowers, wildlife, and even people.

Tip #4: Don't rely on pinch & zoom.

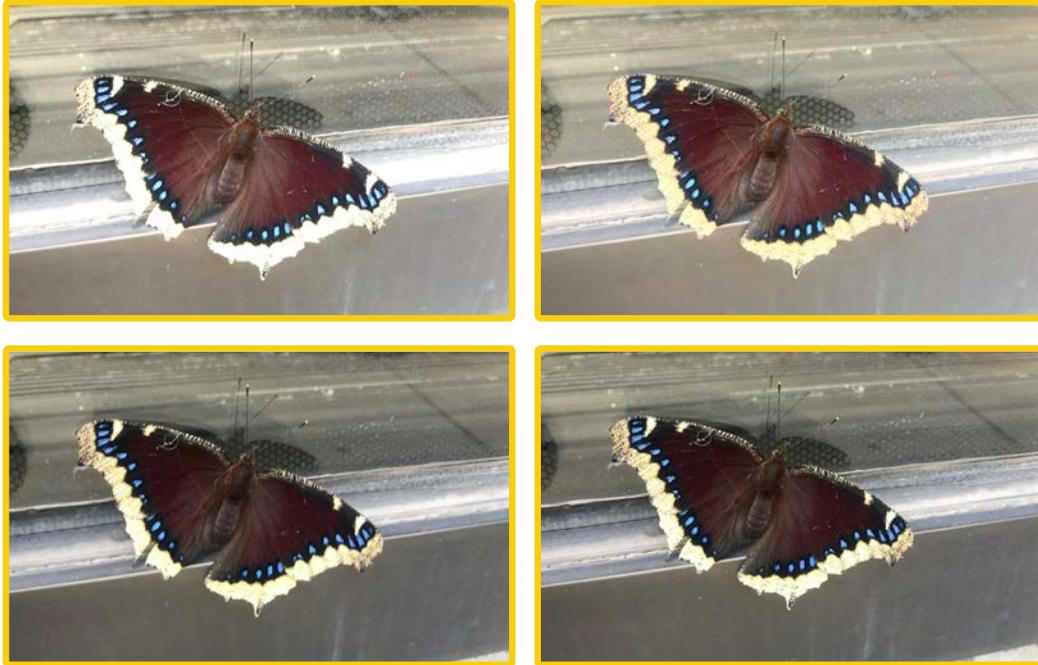
Our smartphones allow us to pinch and zoom way in on the cool objects we see out in the wild, but it's very easy to over zoom and end up with a grainy photo. Instead, see if you can get closer to the object first. If it's not possible, start with a wide shot and then try to gradually zoom in, taking photos along the way. If you pay close attention, you might be able to find a good balance between too far away and too grainy. You can also take your faraway photo and try cropping it down later on. This will help bring focus to the object you saw from a distance without making it look too zoomed in and grainy.



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Tip #5: Take multiple photos.

It's not always easy to tell in the moment which photos will turn out and which ones won't. That's why it's always a good idea to take multiple photos of the same object. If your phone has a burst option, you can use it to take many photos quickly and then review them all later and only save your favorites. This is especially helpful when you're taking photos of fast-moving objects, like birds and butterflies, or in settings where the lighting can change quickly!



Tip #6: Explore what your phone can do.

Many phones now have great built-in settings to help you take the best possible photo. Take the time to explore them. For example, portrait mode will allow you to focus on an object in the foreground while blurring the background. Enabling HDR (high-dynamic-range) can help you create a great photo by taking multiple exposures of the same object and combining them into one composite photo. Some phones also have built-in lighting options. Take the time to explore all the options your phone already has and see how they can impact your photos.



Portrait Mode

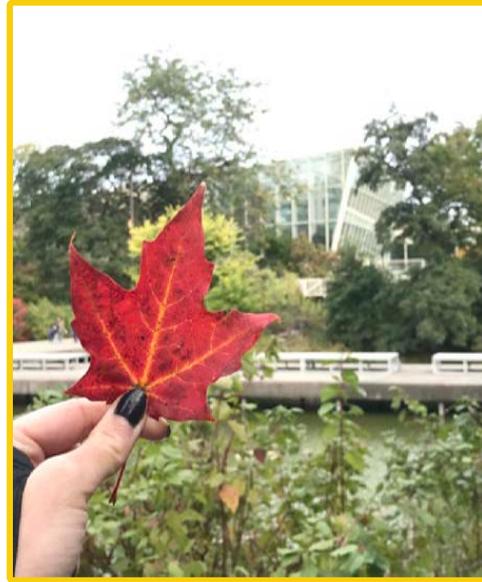
Normal Mode

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Tip #6: Explore what your phone can do (continued).



HDR



Normal Non-HDR

Tip #7: Make adjustments with apps.

There are a number of apps that can help you make changes to your photos. Lightroom, Snapseed, and VSCO all allow you to change features of your photos, including lighting, contrast, and sizing. Phones don't always capture objects in the same way that we're seeing them, and using an app can help you get your photos closer to your actual experience. Take the time to explore their capabilities beyond just their fun filters!

