

Spring is Here

by Noella Ballenger

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A birdfeeder is a great way to invite birds into your garden and have instant models.

Spring is here--in spite of the unseasonable April snow in Colorado and heavy rains in California. You can always spot spring by that brief, magical moment when tiny leaves sprout on trees and flowers peek out of the debris of winter. Almost overnight, blossoms explode into fields of color. Flowerboxes and flowerbeds awaken and scream for attention.

In California, we're lucky because we find color in our gardens all year long. However, spring can be exceptional. The first thing you need to do if you want to get wonderful photos of spring is to take your camera out of the bag and use it. Don't wait for your summer vacation. Start now.

Just for fun, I visited a neighbor's yard, checking out the blooms there. My neighbors have a wonderful way with plants, so it was a perfect place to begin. A certain sign of spring is the return of the warm weather birds. My neighbors like listening to them sing, so they hang feeders around the yard. Feeders provide a great and relatively easy way to capture terrific bird photographs. Use a tripod and get the camera set and focused. Check the light reading and set that, as well. I use a cable release, so I can sit quietly and enjoy until--with a click of the cable release--I photograph the birds.

Butterflies are a little more difficult as subjects. They tend to come later in the spring in my area, and you need to be a really good observer to anticipate them. Where do they feed? Are there certain flowers that attract them over and over again? Once you have an idea of a good place to situate yourself, set up your camera and wait. You'll probably have to handhold the camera, so keep the speed up, a higher ISO, and keep the lens aperture open. That way, the background will be soft, and you have a much better chance of having the butterflies in focus and properly exposed.

This year, my neighbors have some fabulous orchid plants in their garden, examples of a banner year for orchids in Southern California. I let my camera and my eye feast on the color and number of blossoms. So, if you don't have a green thumb, check out your neighbors' gardens to see what's available.

My enthusiasm for shooting flowers inspired me to try my luck in the Mojave Desert next. The California Poppy Preserve is located about an hour or so north of Los Angeles. This year was a heavy rain year, and we didn't receive enough warm days to make the poppy fields fabulous. Unfortunately, the Poppy Preserve didn't have much in the way of flowers, but as I checked out some of the hills along California Highway 138, I spotted large areas of orange.

Off I went to explore some of the wonderful dirt roads that crisscross our desert areas. And there they were. A beautiful field of California Poppies--our state flower.

Keep in mind that just being outside trying to shoot beautiful photographs is a fantastic reward. Capturing that special photograph that will allow you to celebrate those feelings all year long is a bonus. We all strive to make each image the best it can be, and that's important. However, it's equally important to enjoy the sun and the vision and spring, wherever you are.



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Wait for the birds to exhibit behavior or to simply sit and be beautiful. Notice the soft background (aperture at F4 or 5.6), which allowed a faster shutter speed to stop motion.

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