

Flower Power

I've been photographing gardens for close on a couple of decades, and it keeps me busy through the summer months, often around the country. Over that time I've worked out some golden rules (not that I always keep to them!). Here are my offerings for photographing borders, which way well be at their very best now.

- ◆ Choose the right light – this is the number one rule. Avoid bright sunshine. Light cloud is better. Even heavy cloud or light rain can work. Best of all is hazy sunshine very early in the morning or late evening. Avoid wind.
- ◆ Don't feel that you have to include the sky. The composition can be much stronger without it, and light areas are distracting. Aim to fill the frame with the subject – a tip for composing any photo.
- ◆ Extract just one part of a border. This can work better than including the whole length. Find something to act as a point of compositional focus, be it a group of plants, urn, obelisk or whatever. A well thought-out flower border (as indeed a good garden) will have obvious focus points. Incidentally, well-designed 'good' gardens, for this very reason, are far easier to photograph than weak ones. The work of composing has been done for you!
- ◆ Take photos of borders diagonally rather than face on. Straight lines tend to cut photos in half. Plus the flowers look more impressively 'stacked' when viewed along the border's length, an appearance you can intensify by using a longer focal length or a long lens
- ◆ Try – but only if there's room – getting behind the border, sometimes you get a better angle. Likewise a bit of height can be worth considering.
- ◆ ALWAYS ask permission from the garden owner if you want to use a tripod or may want to use the photos for publication. And never deadhead flowers without permission – those seed heads might be there with a purpose!

Many thanks to Levens Hall and Head Gardener, Chris Crowder for allowing me to use their inspirational border. As Chris says “and to think all these flowers came from packets of seeds!”



The delphinium border. The light was good – though very gentle evening light would have been ideal. I set my Nikon D300 on a tripod and used my Nikon 105mm lens. I wanted everything in focus, with maximum depth of field so set the aperture to f 32 with a resulting slow speed of 1/25th sec.