



PSNZ Help Sheet No 25

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**Photographing Fungi**  
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***Fungi photography poses a real challenge for any photographer because it is essential that you know your equipment well and that you can compose your photograph in a way that is going to take the result beyond a record shot, if that is what you intend. So, the first decisions you have to make are these:***

1. What is the purpose of photographing this fungi? – as a scientific record of it, purely for reference, or to blow the socks off the next salon judge who views this image for the first time.
2. Having made that decision will determine what you do next, so we will assume that you want a “blowing the socks off type effect”
3. Not all fungi that you will find lend themselves to being photographed for this purpose. The features that particularly catch my interest are shape, colour, and translucence, but fungi such as stinkhorns are worth photographing because they look so unusual and weird.
4. If you want high quality images then I’m afraid that you will need a dedicated macro lens, any other options are there to avoid the issue, which is money. Again, what do you intend using this image for?  
For transmission on the internet you would probably get away with using the bottom of a milk bottle.

Another essential piece of equipment is a tripod that can cope with awkward positions and heights, particularly ground level and so a Benbo type tripod is useful here. There are a number of brands on the market at varying prices.

A cable release is also very useful, along with the time release function on your camera.

A range of reflectors, a mirror, silver paper, stainless steel, and white card, are all useful for reflecting light, and the intensity of the ambient light will determine which of these you might use.

Having found a worthwhile subject to photograph, do the following:

1. Remove any loose material from around the fungi unless it enhances the image that you want. This is known by some people as “gardening”.
2. View the subject from all angles and decide the best view possible for the image. To obtain the maximum sharpness from your lens, make sure that the plane of the film in your camera is parallel with the plane of the main subject of your photograph eg. stalks and heads.
3. Set up your camera on the tripod and focus on the background to check on what is there.
4. Focus on the front edge of the fungi with the lens fully open ,F 5.6 usually. Adjust the focus so that just a little further back than the front edge is now the focal point. If you have a

- depth of field preview button, use this to check on the image when the lens is closed down to F16 or F22.
5. Decide on which F Stop you want to take the image at. Remember that a larger F Stop number is going to give a greater depth of field. That is the depth of the image that is sharp to the eye - the more the better. At the same time as your subject is becoming sharper, then so is the background, so check it again. Obviously, the further away the immediate background is from the subject the better.
  6. Can you see stem (stipe), gills and the top features of at least one cap? Adjust the camera angle to suit.

Now comes the "X Factor" part of the exercise. It is over to you to decide on composition, how you use your reflector(s) and the exposure that you are going to use. All of these are the personal input aspects of the photographic process that stamp your mark on the image - true of any other subject matter in photography. I suggest that you bracket your exposures so that you are sure to obtain the effect that you wanted in at least one of the frames. Don't be surprised if you have to expose for up to two minutes; forests are dark places. If a wind is blowing you might have to resort to using a flash to light the subject as you certainly won't be able to get a sharp image any other way.

The best time of year to go hunting for fungi is early autumn, seven days after rain, and native forest will provide the most colourful fungi. Be prepared to get dirty and wet. My preferred film is Fuji Velvia because of the excellent saturation, but whatever you are happy with is the one to use.

Happy hunting.

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