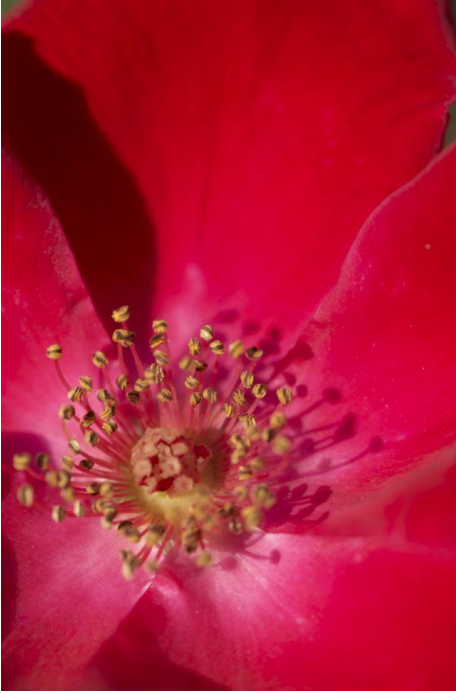


## GETTING THE MOST OUT OF YOUR GARDEN PHOTOS

By Gretchen Stark, Master Gardener Intern



William B. Folsom, resident photographer for Meadowlark Gardens Regional Park in Vienna, Virginia, shares some practical tips and observations for gardeners who would like to get the most out of their garden photos. Folsom has been taking photographs of Meadowlark Gardens since the mid-1990s and teaching photography classes there for the past ten years. This award winning photographer began his work with Meadowlark by photographing the different species of butterflies that can be found in the park. Some of his suggestions appear below along with some of his photos.

**Getting started:** There are many good digital cameras with basic “point and shoot” capabilities. Although these cameras have some limitations, one advantage is that they can generally be tucked into a pocket, so the gardener can always be ready to take a photo. To stay “photo ready” gardeners also need to be familiar with the camera functions and to always have a charged battery on hand. Becoming familiar with the camera begins with reading the camera manual and continues with practice until the camera functions become second nature.

**Learning to look:** Anyone spending time in the garden weeding, planting and inspecting plants is already on the way to being a keen observer of nature. Learning to look for what would make a good photograph is a first step in becoming a satisfied photographer and can be taken with no camera at all. It helps develop an eye for composition. Curiosity fosters the ability to notice small details, textures and patterns that can be the focus of interesting photos. Folsom often captures the details of individual flowers or other plants. For example, in the photo below Folsom has drawn our eye to a single blade of grass, a detail that a hurried pass through the garden would miss. Folsom’s attention to this detail has provided an image that captures our imagination.



Patience and planning also help develop the photographer’s eye for image and contribute to the ability to capture the right moment. Part of the planning process requires learning about the environments and habits of the flora or fauna that will be the subject of the photos.

In the photo below, Folsom captured the Meadowlark goose shaking out its feathers by waiting patiently until it had finished preening.

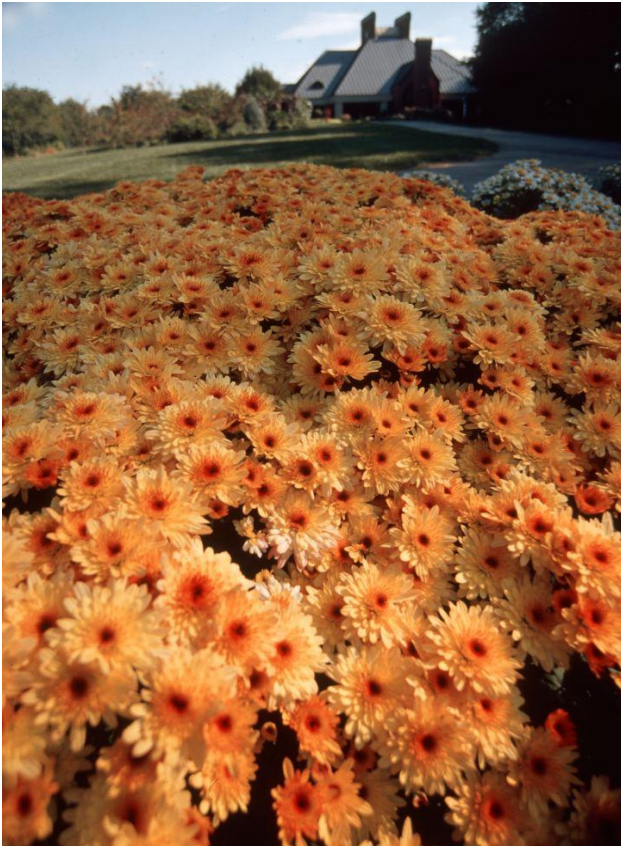


**Designing thirds:** One basic rule of photography is the “rule of thirds.” When preparing to take a photo, think about dividing the scene into thirds, both horizontally and vertically. Folsom tells us to imagine a tic tac toe board overlaying the scene. Placing the important feature in the intersection of the horizontal and vertical lines emphasizes the main object and draws the observer’s eye to it, while incorporating the other features in the photo into a whole image.



In this photo the photographer has used the technique with a close-up shot that captures both the beauty of the flower and the exotic beauty of the butterfly. The images of the butterfly and its position on the flower are not in the center of the photo and but are positioned to create drama and interest.

In the next photo, the technique is illustrated using a vista or larger landscape view.



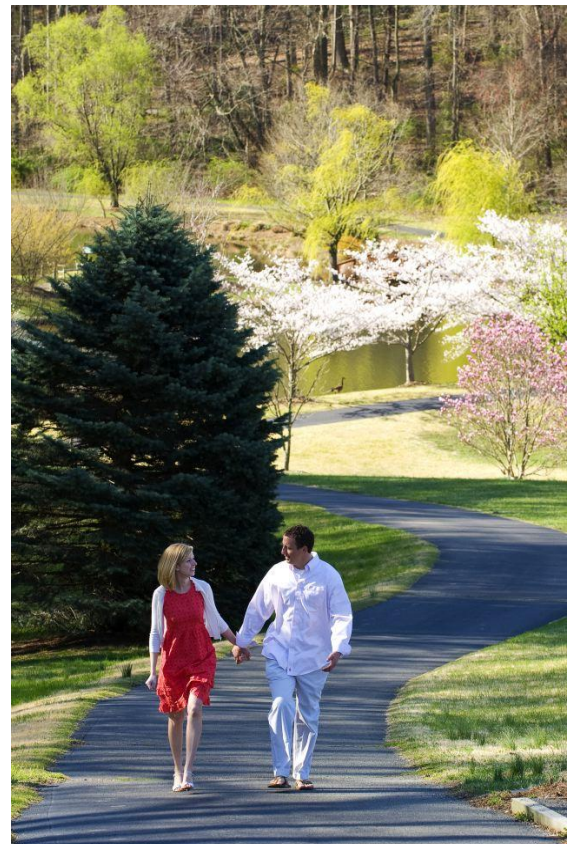
**Looking for lines and curves:** Lines and angles give photos interest and also draw the observer's eye to the main object in the photo. Curves can cause the eye to move or travel through the photo.

In the following photo of cardinals, the angled branches not only give the bird a natural setting but also create drama and echo the angular lines of the bird's tail and tufted head.



To the right, the vista of Meadowlark Gardens, showing a winding path, invites the viewer to wander down it to see what is around the bend.

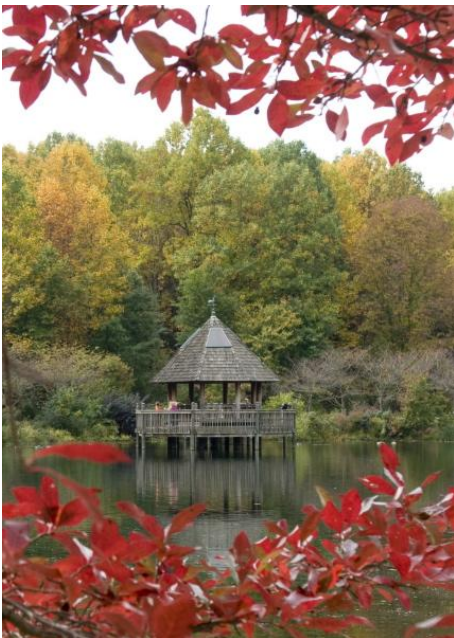
**Working in the light:** New photographers often pay little attention to the time of day as they take photos, but since light changes during the day, controlling the outcome of a photo requires an understanding of how light affects the image. For example, bright midday light is often harsh because it casts more severe shadows. While Folsom says that good photographs can be taken at any time, his favorite times of the day are the early morning and the late afternoon as dusk approaches. Like gardeners, he has noticed that the gardens at those times of day tend to be filled with insect, bird, butterfly and animal activity. The quality of the light is also softer then, since shadows are not so prominent. Other factors, such as dappled light and cloud cover, affect the light for photographs; with



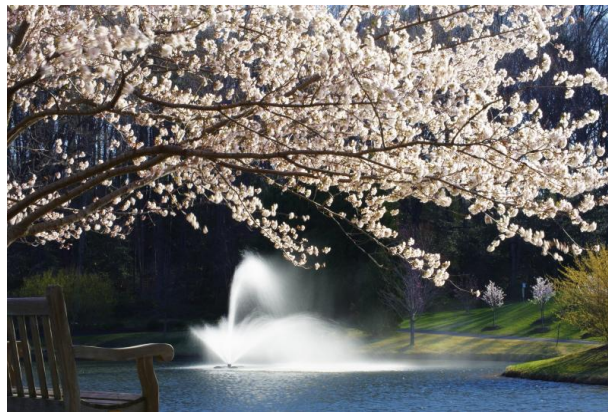
so many light variables, whole classes can be devoted to exploring the light requirements for a good photo. This winter scene is one example of how light can create color and mood.



**Framing the shot:** Another technique which creates scope, depth and scale is the technique of "framing" the main image. The "frame" might be the branches of a tree or a physical object such as a fence, or arbor. The frame draws the eye to the main object in the photo. The two photos below show this framing technique using branches as the frame.



In the photo on the left, the autumn branches frame the Meadowlark Lake Gazebo and set the mood of the season for the shot while drawing the eye to the architectural feature.



In this photo, the branches of the blooming cherry trees frame the lake and draw our eye to the fountain, while the colors are repeated in the smaller trees at the edge of the lake.

**Using color and contrast:** Gardeners are used to seeking color, variety and contrast in their plants to create beautiful healthy garden areas. These same features are important to creating satisfying and memorable photos.

In the photo to the right, Folsom has used the red chairs as a striking contrast to the white snow. The photo also contrasts the lines of the chair with the smooth surfaces of the snow.





In this photo, Folsom contrasts both the round shape and the color of the azalea blossoms with the upright lines of the tree trunks with their deep browns and green leaves.

### **Expanding photography skills:**

Gardeners wanting to practice and expand their skills have many resources in Northern Virginia and the Washington DC area to help them. There are adult education courses that are a part of the

local school systems, and a variety of courses are available at the local colleges and universities. The area also has many photography clubs open to people at all skill levels. There are also many photography shows available in the Washington DC area museums.

### **Further Resources:**

**Meadowlark Botanical Gardens Regional Park** has a long history of partnering with photographers of all kinds. The park offers a lecture series on photography and has a list of classes for photographers. In 2000, Meadowlark was host to the first Meadowlark Nature Photography Expo. The event has become so popular that it outgrew Meadowlark's ability to host it, and the expo was moved to a larger venue in Prince William County.

Part of Folsom's work with Meadowlark has involved documenting with photography the variety of butterflies at the park. In the past nine years the number of species of butterflies alone has increased from 20 to 53 as a consequence of the development of a large and growing section of native plants started by Meadowlark director Keith Tomlinson.

Information about programs are found at the Meadowlark web page:

[www.nvrpa.org/parks/meadowlark](http://www.nvrpa.org/parks/meadowlark)

On **Saturday April 17, 2010 a class on Garden and Flower photography** will be held at Meadowlark Botanical Gardens. William Folsom will teach the class. Details about this and other classes are found on William B. Folsom's web page.

**More about William Folsom:** William B. Folsom has been the resident photographer for Meadowlark Gardens since 1994. He has had long experience in photographing birds, and his early interest at Meadowlark was in photographing and documenting the varieties of butterflies at the park. Folsom has written several books and his photographs have won several awards and are published in a variety of books and journals. Both of Folsom's butterfly books give information on butterfly habitats and techniques for "stalking" the butterfly to capture the image. His latest book, Butterfly Photographer's Handbook, published in 2009 has information specifically for those with digital cameras, and his earlier book, The Art and Science of Butterfly Photography, has

more useful information for those with film cameras. The upcoming issue of "The Washington Gardener" will feature some of Folsom's work. Folsom is the instructor for the photography classes held at Meadowlark Garden Regional Park. Folsom also has a private studio in McLean, Virginia. You can learn more about him and his work at: [www.wfolsom.com](http://www.wfolsom.com)

Books:

THE ART AND SCIENCE OF BUTTERFLY PHOTOGRAPHY by William Folsom, Amherst Media, Inc., 2000

BUTTERFLY PHOTOGRAPHER'S HANDBOOK by William Folsom  
Amherst Media, Inc. 2009

### **Contacts for Area Camera Clubs**

#### **Loudoun Photography Club**

Mary Austin-Keller at 703-435-8907  
Or [info@loudounphoto.com](mailto:info@loudounphoto.com)  
<http://www.loudounphoto.org>

#### **Manassas Warrenton Camera Club**

Gene Wells at 703-330-5835  
Or [ewellsjr@verizon.net](mailto:ewellsjr@verizon.net)  
<http://www.mwcc-photo.org>

#### **McLean Photography Club**

Bruce Copping at 703-725-9331  
Or [bcopping@gmail.com](mailto:bcopping@gmail.com)  
<http://www.mcleanphoto.org>

#### **Northern Virginia Photographic Society**

Emi Wallace at 703-278-2828  
Or [emiwallace@cox.net](mailto:emiwallace@cox.net)  
<http://www.nvps.org>

#### **Reston Photographic Society**

Ellis Rosenberg at 703-855-4008  
Or [erosenberg@cox.net](mailto:erosenberg@cox.net)  
<http://www.leagueofrestonartists.org>

#### **Vienna Photographic Society**

Mary Jane Fish at 703-281-9743  
Or [Fishfotos@aol.com](mailto:Fishfotos@aol.com)  
<http://www.vps-va.org>