Woodland Photography: Composition and perspectives

Creative composition is an easy way of improving your photos without the need for expensive equipment!

Often a centrally placed subject is uncomfortable to the viewer, so many photographers use the 'rule of thirds' to create a more pleasing image.

**Try this:** Imagine that the photo you are taking has two vertical lines and two horizontal lines running across it (see right) - many digital cameras have the option to show these gridlines on the screen. Place the horizon along one of the horizontal lines, and a prominent feature along one of the vertical lines, or where the lines cross.

When you are looking for good compositions, think about viewpoints too. Standing or crouching, angle the camera up or down to see how different the image looks. Try looking directly down, or getting a bug’s eye view. Flowers and trees when seen from below can produce vibrant and engaging photographs, as the light can illuminate details and colours.

**Foreground/background**

If you look at any great landscape painting, you'll see the depth it achieves by having a foreground, midground and background. This is because the human eye looks for visual clues in a flat image to help it work out the depth and perspective of a photo.

- When looking at a landscape, try including different foregrounds to ‘anchor’ the scene - whether they are in focus or not, they can help to create a more appealing image.
- Try the ‘frame within a frame’: framing your woodland image with leaves or branches, or using any other features that are available.
- Change your viewpoint: for example, photograph a leaf from above with the forest floor as background, and then from underneath with sky as the backdrop.
Using different lens settings

Wide angle settings are good for landscapes and getting lots of the image in focus. It makes the foreground appear closer and the background further away. Zoom lenses are good for zooming in on subjects like wildlife and blurring the background. The more you zoom in the flatter the perspective is with the background appearing much closer.

Try this: Select a large tree standing alone. Zoom in and walk back until the whole tree is framed within the image. Then walk towards the tree taking three or four photos, keeping the composition the same but changing the zoom setting. See how it affects the perspective compared to how the human eye sees it. When very close and not zoomed in (i.e. on the widest angle of the zoom) look up at the tree and see how the vertical lines taper and converge. This distortion can be used to add interest to a photo.

Lock the focus:

Manual - zoom in and focus on the object, then pull out and reframe if necessary. This keeps your main focus pin-sharp, but allows you more freedom in the composition.

Automatic - many digital cameras automatically focus on prominent features on the screen when you half-press the shutter. To take advantage of this, allow the camera to pinpoint the object you’d like to focus on, half-press the shutter, then reposition the frame to show the composition you like and take the photo. Great if you want that tree in the bottom-right third of the frame, but your camera will only focus on it if it’s in the centre of the frame.

Take a look at our other woodland photography guides for advanced techniques and specialist tips:

- Woodland photography fundamentals
- Lighting and colour
- Tips and tricks
- Autumn photography tips
- How to find a wood and upload images

Find your nearest woods and download free activities and resources to help you plan your visit at visitwoods.org.uk