

Madison PhotoPlus the Photo Summit e-Photo Newsletter

July 2007

Fireworks Photos Are Easy

Taking high quality fireworks photos is simple if you follow a few simple rules. Part of the technique is preparing to take the pictures, just like part of cooking on the grill is remembering to light the fire. With film cameras, be sure to have plenty of film - ISO 100 or slower. If you use digital, download your memory card & burn a CD of whatever is on the card, format the card (if you haven't previously) and make sure you have plenty of batteries.

You'll need a way to keep your camera steady, preferably with a tripod. It can be big or small - if you don't have one, perhaps you have a bean bag. You're going to be using longer exposure times than anyone can hold by hand.

The following accessories will be handy to have with you when you're taking your photos: a small flashlight; a chair, stool, towel or blanket to sit on; a remote release for your camera; spare batteries; an illuminated timepiece that reads out in seconds and a microfiber cloth to make sure your lens is clean.

Arrive early to find a good vantage point - one without a tree or fence right in front of you. Be sure there are no bright lights behind where the fireworks

will be set off, or they will be in every picture you take (and ruin them all). If using a 35mm camera, use a focal length between 28mm and 35mm; if using a digital SLR, something between 18mm and 25mm; if using a compact digital camera, use the wide angle end of your zoom (**all** point and shoot cameras zoom to their widest angle automatically as they are turned on).

If using a digital camera, go into the camera's menu and set it for the highest quality with least compression possible. If you don't know how, call one of us and ask or if that's not possible, look in that funny little book that came with the camera.

While you're at it, take your camera off the "green zone", "program" or "auto" - automation will only get in your way (as will be explained later). Find out how to set your camera for long shutter speeds, 1 second and longer. These are the only shutter speeds you'll be using.

Put your camera on the tripod or other support you brought and aim it as best you can towards where you anticipate the fireworks will be illuminating the sky. Aim well, as you will not be able to look through the camera while taking your photos.

Uh Oh! Here Comes the Science

The actual fireworks (foreground) are very bright, while the sky (background) is very dark. If you've been reading these newsletters for a while, you know this means that you have to think and not rely on automation.

Take your digital camera off Auto ISO, and set it to either 50 or 100. Take your exposure mode off automatic, and set your aperture to either 5.6 or 8. Set your shutter speed to 1 second.



This is a beautiful available light photo, but you won't want a streetlight like this one in your fireworks photos.

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The actual aerial fireworks lasts about 3-5 seconds and is extremely bright. If you leave your camera set to auto, your camera will try to expose for the very dark sky immediately before the shell bursts, thereby grossly overexposing and ruining the shot. If you want to capture a single shellburst, you have to be very accurate in when your shutter opens without moving the camera. If you want to capture more than 1 shellburst, use longer shutter speeds! As long as your camera is on a sturdy support, exposures of 30 seconds or longer are easy. (Your camera probably does not have shutter speeds longer than 1 second, so set your camera to "B" and use your flashlight and timepiece.) The longer you let light in, the more minutes of fireworks can be captured in a single photo.

If you are using a remote release for your camera, you'll become easily adept at starting and stopping your shutter. For longer exposure times, read the seconds from that timepiece you brought (you may need the flashlight). If you do not have a remote, you'll need to use the self timer feature of your camera. You'll need the flashlight to find the timer button or switch. Use the shortest delay possible (3 sec. is great) and then quickly remove your hands from the camera.

At the end of the display, you should have pictures as good as this one, shot by CPC Bret.



B.I.P.S.

(Better Imaging Photo School)

Our evening classes are filling up at a faster rate than expected, especially the Basic Digital, Nikon and Photoshop / Lightroom sessions. The schedule is attached once again.

Vacation Time

For those of you travelling with film, remember to use X-Ray proof bags and keep your camera and ALL film in your carry one. Do not put film in your checked luggage. If you are travelling with digital gear, again keep it with you, but nothing in the security equipment will affect your memory cards.

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We'll be back next month with more photo trips and news about our fall photo field trip and more. Have a spectacular July!

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