

SHOOTING SPECTACULAR SUNSETS

BASED ON AN ARTICLE IN SHUTTERBUG MAGAZINE, JUNE 2000

Timing – The most spectacular colors are just when the sun kisses the horizon and after it finishes its kiss but be prepared to photograph at any time during the sunset.

Composition – Don't put the sun dead center. Don't put the horizon dead center. Placing the horizon high in the frame is especially good over water. Placing the sunset low in the frame is effective when the sky has a lot of color.

Foreground elements – We think this is a key to photographing great sunsets. Adding something to the foreground can transform an ordinary sunset into a spectacular photograph. You can even get away with breaking the composition rules. Almost anything in the foreground can work.

Lenses – A wide angle lens can make the sun look very small, but if there is enough color in the sky, that is OK. A telephoto lens makes the sun look huge, but one thing the article fails to say is that looking at the sun through a telephoto lens can permanently burn your eye. This is unlikely to happen when the sun is low on the horizon, but never look at the sun when it is high in the sky.

Accessories – Use a tripod in low light. Red, yellow, or orange filters may help a dull sunset, but don't use them during a good sunset. Graduated filters, dark on the top and clear on the bottom, can even out the brightness so that dark areas are visible in the photo.

Film – The magazine recommends Kodak Extra Color 100 and Kodak Elite Chrome 200. I don't care for "extra color" films because they can look unrealistic. I recommend slide films because sunsets tend to have deep colors that printers tend to lighten when printing from a negative.

Exposure – Magazine recommends getting a meter reading (with a spot meter) from the brightest area then taking additional shots ½ over and ½ under exposed. I recommend experimenting with your camera, taking notes, and learning what works best with your equipment.

Tips that were not in the magazine article – You can take interesting sunset photos even without clouds. For something different, use reflections and cut out the sky completely.