11 Tips for Beginner Photographers

As a new photographer, these are some of the ideas that have helped get me going.

1. Don't go crazy buying the most expensive equipment right away.

It's possible to get very nice photos with an inexpensive point and shoot. The more photos you take, the more you'll know about what kind of camera to get when it's time to upgrade.

2. Consider a tripod.

On the other hand, an inexpensive tripod is worth getting, especially if you have shaky hands like mine. When I got a tripod, my satisfaction with my shots skyrocketed. For even more stability, use your camera's timer function with a tripod.

3. Keep your camera with you all the time.

Photo ops often come when you least expect it. If you can keep your equipment relatively simple - just a small camera bag and a tripod - you might be able to take advantage of some of those unexpected opportunities. Or, if your phone has a camera, use it to take "notes" on scenes you'd like to return to with your regular camera.

4. Make a list of shots you'd like to get.

For those times you can't carry your camera around, keep a small notebook to jot down places you'd like to come back and photograph. Make sure to note any important details, like the lighting, so you can come back at the same time of day or when the weather's right. If you don't want to carry a notebook, send yourself an email using your cell phone.

5. Don't overlook mundane subjects for photography.

You might not see anything interesting to photograph in your living room or your backyard, but try looking at familiar surroundings with fresh eyes. You might catch an interesting trick of the light or find some unexpected wildflowers in your yard. Often a simple subject makes the best shot.

6. Enjoy the learning process.

The best part of having a hobby like photography is never running out of things to learn. Inspiration is all around you. Look at everything with the eyes of a photographer and you'll see opportunities you never noticed before.

7. Take advantage of free resources to learn.

Browse through Flickr or websites like the Digital Photography School Forum for inspiration and tips. Also, your local library probably has a wealth of books on all types of photography. If you're interested in learning about post-processing, give free software like the GIMP a try.

8. Experiment with your camera's settings.

Your point and shoot may be more flexible and powerful than you know. Read the manual for help deciphering all those little symbols. As you explore, try shooting your subjects with multiple settings to learn what effects you like. When you're looking at your photos on a computer, you can check the EXIF data (usually in the file's properties) to recall the settings you used.

9. Learn the basic rules.

The amount of information about photography online can be overwhelming. Start with a few articles on composition. Be open to what more experienced photographers have to say about technique. You have to know the rules before you can break them.

10. Take photos regularly.

Try to photograph something every day. If you can't do that, make sure you take time to practice regularly, so you don't forget what you've learned. An excellent way to motivate yourself is by doing the weekly assignments in the DPS Forum.

11. Don't be afraid to experiment.

If you're using a digital camera, the cost of errors is free. Go crazy - you might end up with something you like. You'll certainly learn a lot in the process.