

# 10 Tips for Beautiful Fruit Photography

A Post By: [Rick Ohnsman](#)



## TIPS FOR AMAZING FRUIT PHOTOGRAPHY

Fruits are incredible photographic subjects. They feature beautiful textures, colors, and shapes; they're also highly accessible. After all, to find a subject (or 10!), you merely need to head to your local supermarket.

But how can you capture pro-level fruit photography? As a veteran fruit snapper, I've developed plenty of techniques to achieve consistently outstanding images. And that's what I share in this article: My top 10 tips that'll help you create well-composed, beautifully lit photos. Specifically, I explain:

- A way to **light your subjects** that'll produce breathtakingly ethereal results
- How to choose the perfect background
- A quick tip to keep your subjects looking fresh
- Much more!

Ready to capture fruit shots like a pro? Then let's dive right in, starting with my first tip:

## 1. Carefully choose your subject

Different fruits lend themselves to different types of images – so it's important you choose your subjects *carefully*.

If you're after a classical-type **still-life shot**, pick traditional subjects like pears, apples, and lemons. If you're interested in modern, commercial-type **food images**, then pick whatever you plan to sell – but if you want to make your shot appear especially refined, ensure that your individual fruits are in tip-top shape (i.e., free of bruises, cuts, and other blemishes).

That said, you can create unique shots by embracing unusual subjects. Even if they're not the subjects that you'll find in 1600s still-life paintings, they can certainly add to your compositions!

And while it's generally best to use near-perfect subjects, you can also have fun working with wilting fruit, especially if your

goal is to create a still life. Aim to steer into the skid; adjust your lighting and background for darker, moodier shots that emphasize the steady march toward death and decay.

## 2. Use natural lighting for a



As I explore throughout this article, there are *many* effective ways to light a fruit photo. But the simplest way – and the one that I recommend for beginners – is to use natural window light.

Find a reasonably large window that doesn't experience direct sunlight. (In other words, go for a window that faces north or south.) That way, you can work with softer, lower-contrast lighting all day long! If you don't have access to a north- or south-facing window or the window light is still a bit too harsh, try waiting for a cloudy day or draping a sheet over the window frame. Both of these strategies will produce *gorgeous* diffused light.

Set up your fruits on a table near the window. I'd recommend ensuring that the light hits your arrangement from the side, but feel free to move the table backward and forward until you get a look you like.

And if you find that the shadows are a little too heavy, add a simple **reflector** or a piece of white poster board to bounce some light back into the darkness.

## 3. Don't be afraid of artificial

# lighting



While natural lighting is a great way to get started with fruit photography, artificial lighting does come with several advantages. It gives you far greater control over the light direction, you can rely on it all day and night without issue, and you can control the hardness and softness with ease.

So if you find that natural light is too inflexible for your purposes, consider grabbing some artificial light sources. You have plenty of options here; it really all depends on your interests and budget!

If you want to keep the cost to a minimum, LED flashlights are cheap, small, and portable. You can set them up around your food arrangement, though they tend to be relatively dim, so you'll need to use a longer exposure to capture a bright image.



When working with small subjects, an LED flashlight might be all the light you need. (Also, are peppers a fruit? Technically, yes!)

Another option is a continuous lighting kit, which you can pick up for a few hundred dollars. **Continuous lights** are decently bright, *and* most importantly, they remain lit at all times. This is a big deal for beginners; it allows you to see the exact effects of the lights as you set up your shot.

That said, if you plan to get serious about studio food photography, it's best to invest in some **speedlights** or studio strobes. While you won't be able to see the lighting effect in advance, these light sources are incredibly powerful – so powerful, in fact, that they can overwhelm all ambient light sources to produce cool lighting effects.

Strobes also offer literally *thousands* of **modifier options**. In other words, you can use **snoots**, reflectors, **scrims**, **softboxes**, and **colored gels** to direct the light, soften the light, harden the light, color the light, and more. Sure, strobes are

expensive – but if you want to become a dedicated food shooter, they're a must-have.

## 4. Use light painting for dramatic results

In the previous sections, I explored the power of conventional lighting sources. But there's an alternative lighting option that I'd like to discuss:

**Light painting**, which you can use to create dramatic, directional, and even *ethereal* effects, like this:



Light painting requires surprisingly little equipment – just a flashlight, a camera, and a tripod – and while it does take some experimentation and practice, the results are often astonishing.

Here's how it works:

First, put your camera on a rock-steady tripod, set the **shutter speed** to 10 seconds or so, and drop the **ISO** to its lowest setting in order to minimize noise. Feel free to use a **narrow aperture** to achieve plenty of **depth of field**; if you need to

lower your shutter speed to compensate, that shouldn't be a big deal!

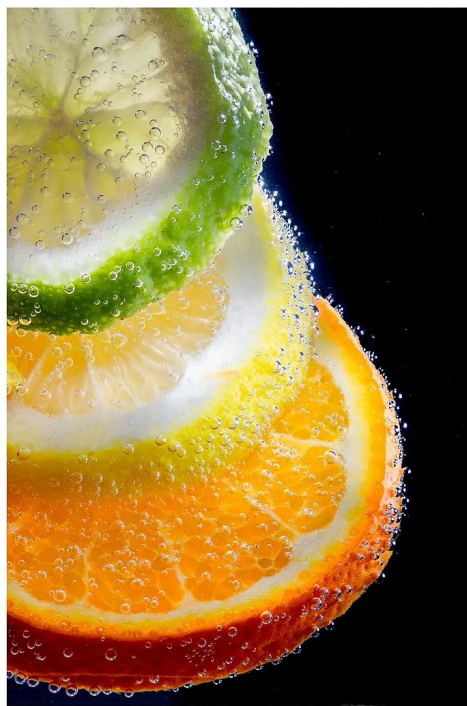
Then trigger the shutter using either a [remote release](#) or the two-second timer to eliminate vibrations. Once the exposure has begun, turn on your flashlight and *paint* it across the scene. For a dramatic look, try painting from off to the side, and aim to keep the lighting direction relatively consistent, even as you sweep the beam of light across different subjects.

One of my favorite light-painting photographers is [Carlo Denino](#). He often uses this technique to produce exquisite shots of fruits and other still-life subjects. I encourage you to give his images a look and see if you can emulate his style. I know from personal experience it's not nearly as easy as it might look!

## 5. Carefully choose your lighting direction



Canon EOS 6D 1/30 sec at f / 8.0 ISO 800



Canon EOS 6D 1/4 sec at f / 22 ISO 800

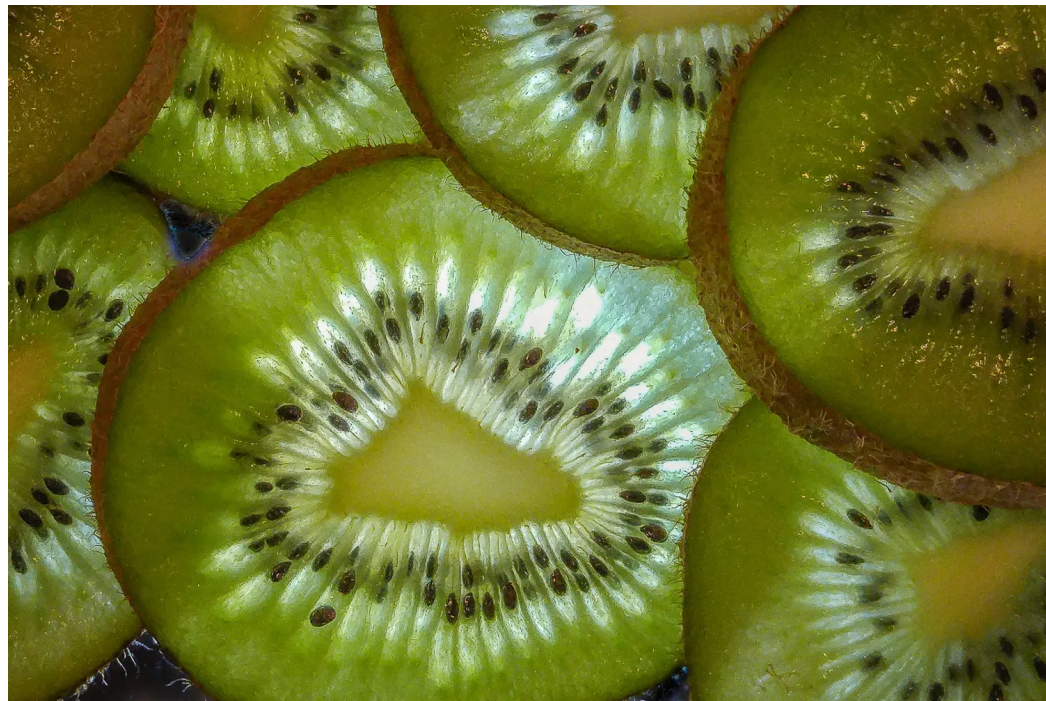
Citrus fruits sliced thin make great subjects for backlighting as the colors and textures are so interesting. We also expect to see them in drinks and scenes like this.

When you're first getting started with fruit photography, you may be tempted to position the light directly in front of your subject arrangement.

Unfortunately, this will produce very flat, uninspiring results. The best shots tend to feature lots of *depth*, of *three-dimensionality*, which you can only achieve by positioning the light off to the side.

Direct **side lighting**, for instance, will emphasize texture while creating plenty of mood and drama. You can also try **backlighting**, which will create a beautiful halo around the subject, though the subject itself will be partially or completely silhouetted unless you add a second light or reflector on the opposite side.

If you want to get some ultra-creative looks, consider shining a light *through* your subject. Thin fruit slices work great for this. For the example below, I sliced a kiwi, placed the slices on a glass pie plate, then stuck an LED flashlight underneath. The light really emphasized the color and detail.



At the end of the day, lighting direction is all about experimentation. Constantly make adjustments to your light positions, and see what you can create!

## 6. Pick the right background

As with any other photo subject, when you stage a fruit photo, you must carefully consider the **background**. It should complement the subject without distracting, overwhelming, or otherwise interfering.

The best background is often the simplest, so when you're first starting out, I'd encourage you to create a completely

white or black background. Start with white or black paper, then adjust your lighting as needed. To create an all-white backdrop, shine a light directly on the white paper; to create an all-black backdrop, do what you can to block the light from the background paper.

Depending on your lighting setup, you may get the results you're after – or you may need to take the look the rest of the way in Lightroom. Lightroom makes it very easy to blow out the highlights or clip the shadows via a mask. Use a brush to paint out the background areas, and you'll soon be left with your main subject against a uniform backdrop.

Once you become more experienced, try adding in more complex – but still complementary! – backgrounds. You can include painted canvas backdrops, which will provide a classical look that harmonizes with your fruit subjects. You might also include different fabrics, which offer plenty of interesting colors and textures.

If you don't have much control over your background, you can use a wide aperture to blur out any distracting details. That's how I handled this food still life:



The fruit here supports the main subject, a raspberry-lemonade cupcake. The background is a piece of scrapbooking paper from the craft store.

## 7. Spritz things up

The best fruit images tend to feature fresh-looking subjects – yet it can be tough to keep that sense of freshness when you’re working in studio conditions under hot lights.

So what do you do? Well, food photographers have a clever little trick: They use a spray bottle to spritz their subjects with water. The water adds a sheen of freshness to the shot, and

while the average viewer may not consciously notice the difference, they'll certainly *feel* it.

Pro tip: To create larger droplets that hang better and last longer, add a bit of glycerine to the water.

By the way, make sure that you spray your subjects *just before* taking each shot. If you spray too early, the water will evaporate and/or fall off the subject, and you'll lose the fresh look that you so carefully created.

## 8. Get in close

Most food and still life photographers create a beautiful subject arrangement and shoot from a distance – but you can actually capture one-of-a-kind fruit shots by getting much closer.

After all, the structure of living things is often fascinating, so exploring fruits up close can reveal plenty of interesting elements.



Get close and explore the detail with a macro shot!

For close-up shots, a **dedicated macro lens** generally works best, but cheaper alternatives include extension tubes, bellows, close-up filters, and **reverse-lens mounting techniques**. And if you don't wish to purchase *any* additional gear, that's okay, too; try shooting with your closest-focusing lens (you can always do some slight cropping to emphasize little details).

When working at high magnifications, you'll need to watch out for camera shake, so make sure you use plenty of light, a fast shutter speed, and/or a tripod. You'll also need to choose your camera angles carefully; you don't want to cast a shadow onto your subject!

## 9. Tell a story

When creating fruit compositions, you can enhance the scene by adding other story-telling elements.

For instance, if you're photographing an apple, you might add an apple slice, a cutting board, and a knife. If you're photographing an orange, you could add some orange peel, a few additional oranges, and a basket.

Aim to add props that enhance the theme (and avoid those props that distract or don't fit in). Consider the objects that make sense together and that pair naturally.

Of course, don't just position the props randomly; instead, spend time spacing them out around the scene. It may take some practice, but the more you work at your compositions, the better you'll get. Pretty soon, you'll be producing arrangements like a pro!

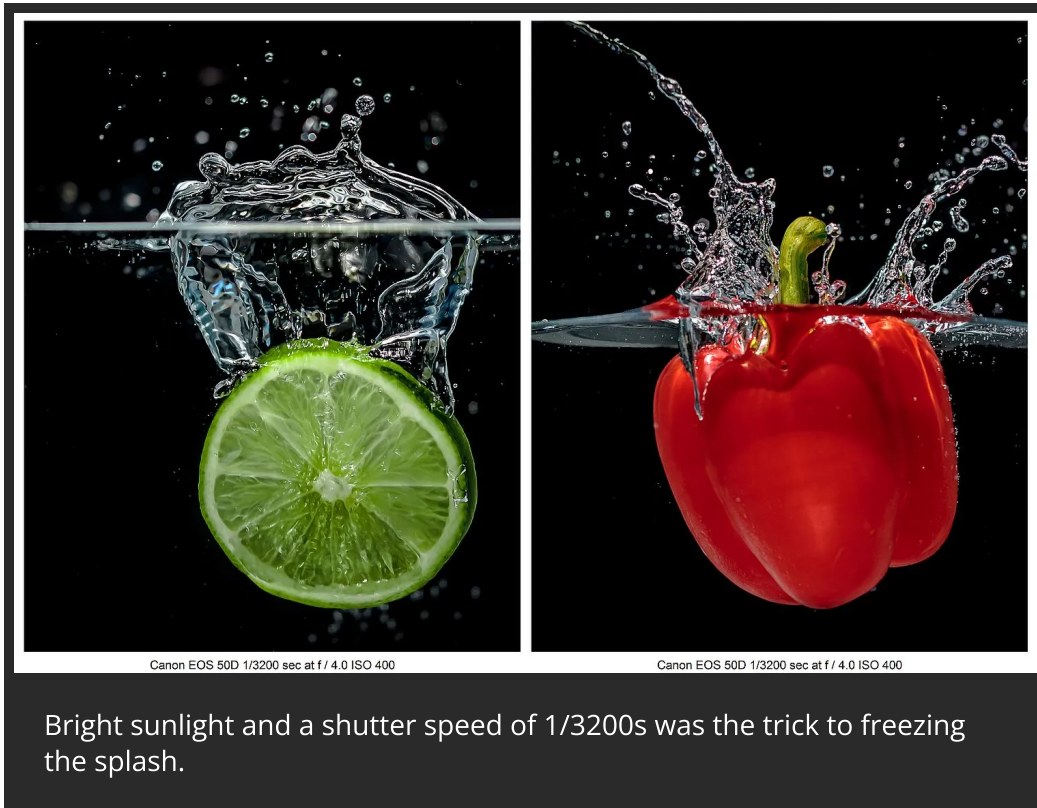


Canon EOS 6D 10.0 sec at f / 16 ISO 100

## 10. Add movement

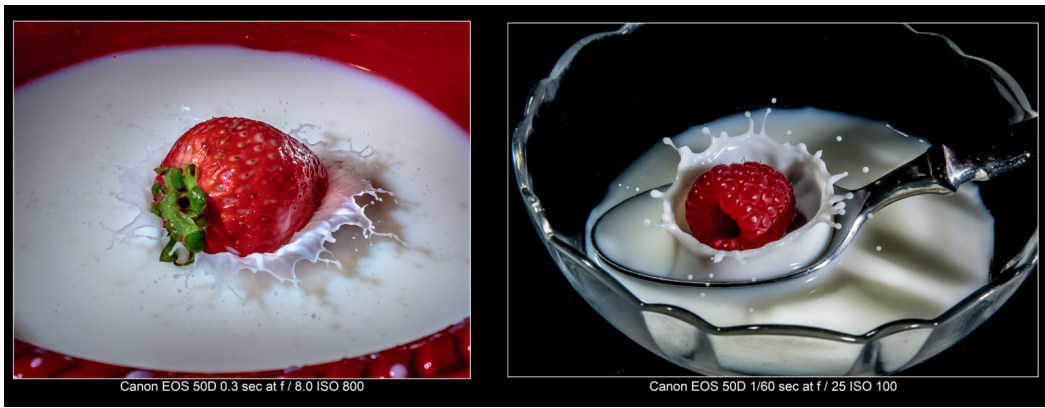
Standard still-life and food photography feature motionless subjects against a motionless backdrop – but does it have to be this way? I don't think so!

There are all sorts of techniques you can use to add a sense of movement to your scene, and I encourage you to try out each and every one. For instance, you might try **splash photography**, where you drop fruits into a tank, then fire the shutter just as they hit the water:



Bright sunlight and a shutter speed of 1/3200s was the trick to freezing the splash.

You can also capture more contextual splashes, where you drop fruit into milk or cereal and photograph the entire scene:



You can even have fun with flash! By firing the flash dozens of times per second, you can capture fruits as they fall through the air.

## Fruit photography tips: final words

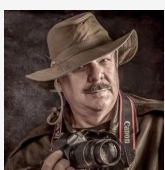
Now that you've finished this article, you're ready to capture some gorgeous fruit shots of your very own.

Remember the tips I've shared. Have fun experimenting with lighting. And see what you can create!

*What fruits do you plan to photograph? What techniques will you use? Share your thoughts in the comments below!*

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**Rick Ohnsman**

Photography isn't just a hobby, it's an adventure! Photography is about sharing my