

Garden Photo Walks for Mindfulness



Much of the time, looking at life through our phones takes us out of the present moment. However, I find that I can use the phone's camera to practice mindfulness. Garden photo walks are my favorite way of practicing this on a regular basis.

What Is Mindfulness?

All that I mean by [mindfulness](#) is the experience of being present in the moment. It's about being with myself, without external noise from something like music or podcasts. It's about noticing what arises within me and around me. Moreover, mindfulness is an awareness that whatever is happening is perfectly okay. I don't need to judge it or change it.

What Are Garden Photo Walks?

There are three obvious components to a garden photo walk:

- A garden. It can be any size. Obviously, I love exploring huge public gardens such as the San Francisco Botanical Garden or our local Japanese Tea Gardens. However, backyard gardens are suitable for garden photo walks as well.
- Photos. For me, it's all about using the lens of the camera to direct my attention to different aspects of the garden. I move between landscapes and close-ups. I try to take photos not in order to share them or even save them but in order to see differently.
- Walking. However, this component can be very minimal. In a large garden, the meandering is a form of walking mindfulness. In a small garden, it's more about the micro-movements. The point is that I'm embodied, rather than in my head.

How The Camera Enhances The Garden Walk

Some people are fully capable of becoming present with the moment simply by sitting in their garden. Others experience it through the act of gardening itself. However, I tend to spend a lot of time in my head. I think the combination of walking while intentionally looking for photo opportunities gives me just the right amount of activity that I'm able to fully get into the moment.

Don't get me wrong; my monkey mind still drifts, of course. I'll find myself thinking about sharing a certain photo. I'll see an unusual plant and think about texting my sister to ask what it is (because she and my mom are far more likely to know than I am.) As with any meditation practice, the mind drifts.

But I keep refocusing, literally, through the lens of the camera. It reminds me to see what is in front of me.

Walking The Same Garden Through The Seasons

Obviously, it's always very engaging to walk in a brand new garden. I visit gardens often on my travels for that very reason. However, there's also something special about walking through the same garden again and again.

I've done photo experiments while I take a photo from the same point of the same plant every day for weeks. Each time, I'm presented with the opportunity to see it anew. This teaches me so much. It reminds me that we can choose to see our lives freshly each and every day. It reminds me that some days a plant may seem like it's wilting only to brighten up the next day in the sun.

Gardens are fleeting and also permanent in their cyclical growth. So are we. Photo garden walks teach me as much about people as they do about plants.

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