

Raimo Suhonen: HOW TO TAKE A PHOTOGRAPH OF A NAIL?

It is easy to take good photographs of nails, if one learns a few important differences from tourist photography. You need a good close-up camera. The SLR camera is "a must" - with a lens of 100 mm focal length preferably. The macro focusing up to 1:1 ratio is necessary. The flash is needed; at least an automatic ring flash - still better is a combination of ring and a "slave" flash- working together - today even wireless. The exposure must be automatic even with manual control for exposure time (e.g. 1/125 s) and aperture (for close-ups e.g. 22). The easiest solutions are "Medical Nikkor"- lens or Yashica Dental Eye III. The best new SLR digital cameras work well, but the prices tend to be still high (e.g. Canon EOS D30 with 100 mm Macro lens - actually 160 mm for use in D30), and you need a computer and software to edit and possibly print the photographs.

The background in a photograph is important. It must be neutral one colour. Black is preferable, because it eliminates the smooth ring flash shadow around the object (ring flash is not shadowless!). A black non-glistening 50 x 50 cm piece of textile works well. Be careful to clean all foreign particles from the nail and the all target area before taking a photograph. It is laborious to edit a hair or material of socks from the picture afterwards!

In close-up photography the depth of focus is always small, only a few millimetres. You should always use a small aperture (high number - usually 22 for 1:2 - 1:1 pictures). If you use automatic focusing, it should be locked before exposure (by pressing the exposure button half-way and keeping it in this position). Now you can use "body-focusing" for fine-tuning. When the target is exactly in focus, and cropping appropriate, press the exposure button all the way down. For manual focusing the procedure is basically the same - the key work is "body focusing" - you move; not the target.

What is most important in the picture - it depends on the diagnosis. If the general view is important (to show that the problem is in all nails or only in some or only on one side), take a general view. To see details take a close up photograph of 1:1 ratio. For surface abnormality a side illumination is necessary (the second flash, or like in Yashica by eliminating a third of the ring flash).

Because no method for controlling the correct exposure is absolutely reliable, it is good to take several pictures with slight over- and under- exposure. This is especially important for film for colour slides with very small tolerance of exposure.

The reflection of the light from the target may destroy the details of the nail. Clean the nail with spirit before photographing (and let dry) to eliminate foreign materials. Take several pictures at slightly different angles. In digital photography you can immediately check the "white" areas and take a new photograph. More accurate is to take rapidly several photos and to check the result on a computer screen.