

Take better photos: Holiday lights

Capture the beauty of the holiday season with these simple tips.

Avoid (or use) blur



Use a tripod to avoid blurred images when you shoot at night.

Lights can be a challenging subject for photographers because even the slightest camera movement can cause a blurred photograph. To achieve crisp shots of holiday lights, it is essential to keep your camera very steady. Here are three ways to avoid camera shake:

- Use a **tripod**.
- Place your camera on a **stable object** like a table and use the **self-timer**.
- If nothing else is available, **lean against something steady** (a tree or a wall) as you hold your camera.

On the other hand, blurry lights can create a beautiful abstract effect. Here's how to achieve that look:

1. Set the **shutter speed** manually. Try a range from 1/2 second up to four full seconds.
2. **Get in close** to the lights and don't include people in the shots.
3. Purposefully **move the camera** as you take the picture.

Tips for shooting indoors



Increase the ISO to get photos of your illuminated tree.

Here are some pointers for better indoor lighting:

- Whenever possible, **turn off your flash** and turn on other lights in the room.
- During the day, **shoot near a window** so you can capture the natural light. As long as you avoid harsh sunlight and shadows, natural light is ideal for photography because colors stay true and the lighting is soft.
- The ISO number determines your camera's sensitivity to light. This means when the ISO is high, it "sees" more light than when it's low. Low-light situations can throw off the sensor. So, if you're in a lighting situation that would normally call for flash, **increase the ISO** on your camera to compensate for not using the flash.

Indoor photo ideas



Take a close up of your lights before they go on the tree.

Here are a few indoor scenes you might want to capture:

- The dog with a collar of holiday lights.
- A message or your family's name spelled out in lights on the floor or a kitchen table.
- People lighting candles.
- A reflection of lights in a window or mirror.

Tips for shooting outdoors



Use the last rays of sun to highlight decorations.

Shoot during twilight

When there's still some light in the sky, you can turn off your flash and take advantage of the beautiful natural light.

Use a tripod

When it's dark-or even at twilight-a tripod is a necessity because long exposure times make it difficult to hold your camera steady.

Shutter speed

For both twilight and nighttime photography, experiment until you get the exposure right.

Outdoor photo ideas



City lights make dramatic photos.

Try these techniques when photographing lights around your home, neighborhood, or downtown area:

Reflections

Photograph lights after a rainfall and capture the reflection in puddles, on the glistening street, or in shop windows. You can even use your camera's Macro setting to catch a reflection in tree ornaments.

Windows

Take photos of indoor lights (a Menorah or Christmas tree) from outside. The cool tones of evening will contrast beautifully with the warmth of the scene inside. If you have outdoor decorations, try the opposite as well.

Car lights

Try slow exposures of cars at night. A shutter speed of a few seconds or longer will make car head and tail lights appear as long bright streams of light (that is, if the cars are moving), along with capturing the beauty of surrounding holiday lights.

Getting the exposure and colors right



Here are three ways to use your camera to fine-tune your holiday pictures:

Bracket your shots to make sure they have just the right exposure. First, manually adjust shutter speed or aperture to what you think is ideal. Then, take a picture one setting below and one setting above that. One of the three photos will look perfect, and the other two will either look lighter or darker.

Some HP cameras such as the [HP Photosmart R967](#) offer a **bracketing feature** that lets you take several different shots with different exposures, as in the example seen here.

For evening, try the **Night Portrait** or **Night Scenery** modes on your HP camera. Both modes use a slow shutter speed. Night Portrait uses the flash and Night Scenery does not. Both require a tripod or a stable surface.

Override your camera's automatic **white balance** feature and adjust it manually instead. Here's why: White balance is your camera's way of creating images with balanced colors. But with holiday lights, "balanced" colors can end up looking dull and faded, so it's best to set this manually. For HP cameras, simply select White Balance from the capture menu and adjust up or down.

Capturing candles



When you're getting candles ready for the holidays in your home, trim the candlewicks to reduce the size of the flames. Smaller flames will make better photos and it's also safer. In addition to taking pictures of the candles themselves, be sure your holiday shots capture the glow that candles cast on objects, people, and pets.