

HOW I SHOOT FIREWORKS

By Gerry Gerling

1. Equipment -

Fireworks should be shot from a tripod. A wide angle lens works best unless the fireworks are at a far distance. You should use a remote shutter release if you have one.

2. Point the camera -

There are three common camera orientations for fireworks:

- a. Camera pointed up at the petal bursts, either portrait or landscape depending on the spread;

- b. Vertical (portrait) with the bottom of the frame showing the stem of the projectile as it leaves the launch site;
- c. Vertical, the same as b. above but showing some foreground, especially water. Little Lake is an ideal spot for this type of shot because the fireworks are launched from a barge in the middle of the lake.

I have several examples of these three types taken at Little Lake on July 1st, 2017. I will also point out some common mistakes. The last picture is a bad example as the shutter was held open too long and it looks muddy.





















.3 Camera settings -

- Set your ISO at 100;
- Set your camera to manual exposure;
- Adjust your shutter to the 'bulb' setting;
- Zoom your lens to a fairly wide angle. The pictures that I just showed were taken at between 18 and 28 mm. (On a crop sensor camera.)
- set the aperture to f/11;

f/11 is a good place to start but check the exposure on your LCD screen to verify. You may have to open up or close down one stop depending on the lighting conditions.

(You poor dears whose cameras only stop down to f/8 may need a neutral density filter.)

4. Setup -

Before the fireworks start, compose the picture with the launch base in the centre at the bottom and lock the tripod head. If the projectiles tend to lean to the left or right you can rotate the camera slightly to suit, (but not when the shutter is open).

5. Procedure -

- When the fireworks start, open the shutter at the bulb setting and leave it open. When the burst is at its peak cover the lens with your hand or some other convenient object. (If you are using your hand you may want to remove your petal type lens hood) Do not close the shutter yet.

(If you expose the burst for too long you will record the dying trailing particles which will detract from the crispness of your image.)

- Uncover the lens for the second burst then cover it again. You can experiment but I have found that two to four bursts on one frame can make a good picture. If the bursts are at different elevations you can include more. If the bursts overlap too much the picture will look muddy. (Like in the poor example I previously showed.)
- You should anticipate at least one at the start so that you show a stem coming from the launch site. (This is sometimes difficult because you don't know when it is coming.)
- Close the shutter and set up for the next set of exposures.

7. Options -

- You can get some extra colour in your shot if you compose to show a reflection in the water in the foreground as I have shown in a few of the examples.
- If the event is showing large bursts overhead and you cannot include any foreground, point your camera up where the bursts are occurring.
- The best shots will show complete bursts which are not cut off by the edge of the frame. Zoom out as you can crop later.

Some luck will be involved. You will be lucky if your keeper rate is one out of three. Photographing fireworks is like a box of chocolates, you don't know what you'll get until you view it on your screen.