A top-down photograph of a plate of yellow pasta with vegetables and cheese, next to a bottle of olive oil and silverware. The plate is dark grey with a speckled pattern. The pasta is yellow and ribbon-shaped, topped with shredded white cheese, fresh basil leaves, cherry tomatoes, and asparagus. A silver fork and spoon are placed to the right of the plate. In the top left corner, there is a dark glass bottle of olive oil and its black lid. The background is a dark, textured surface.

# 30 Food Photography Tips for Bloggers The Ultimate Guide

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# Introduction

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Hello and thanks for getting my first ebook!  
This will be the first of many.

I am Christina Peters and I am a commercial food photographer. I started teaching [food photography classes](#) to bloggers about three years ago and that's what got me inspired to start my blog: [www.foodphotographyblog.com](http://www.foodphotographyblog.com)



There are going to be some tips you might already know here, but hopefully you'll learn some new ones too. I tried to write this so that everyone will get a little something out of it.

While reading, you will see some links. If I wrote a detailed blog post about it, I will link to it from that tip. Also, I do have a few affiliate links to products I sell on Amazon. Those links will take you to my Amazon storefront. **This ebook is protected by US copyright laws. No part of this book can be used in any way, shape or form without direct permission from me. That includes all the images you see here, not just the text.**



# Camera Tips

## 1. No on Camera Flash!

If your camera has a pop up flash - turn this off.

Some cameras will let you turn this off permanently as you can see here. On some cameras the flash is controlled by a button with a little lightening bolt.



This was shot with on camera flash

Front flash never looks good with food. You will end up with specular highlights that will make your food look very greasy, even if it's not and the flash will always have strange shadows from the food as you can see here on the back of the plate.



This was shot without on camera flash

Without the flash the food looks much more appealing and now there are no additional distractions in the shot.

## 2. Use a Small F-Stop #

The shot on the right was taken with my 100mm macro lens set to [F-Stop 2.8](#). The rule of thumb is, the smaller the F-Stop number, the smaller the depth of field - less things in focus.

A small or shallow depth of field really controls where the viewer will look so you can use this to get them to look where you want them to. You can do this by shooting with your camera in Manual mode or in the [“AV” mode](#) or aperture priority. Shallow depth of field also helps to add a lot of depth to a shot.



### Compared to F-Stop 16

The shot on the left was taken with the lens set to set to F-16. There's much more in focus here. The higher the F-Stop number, the higher or larger your depth of field will be.

Now, if you were shooting a large table full of food, like a Thanksgiving day feast, for example, you would probably want more things in focus, therefore you would want to set your camera to a higher F-Stop number.

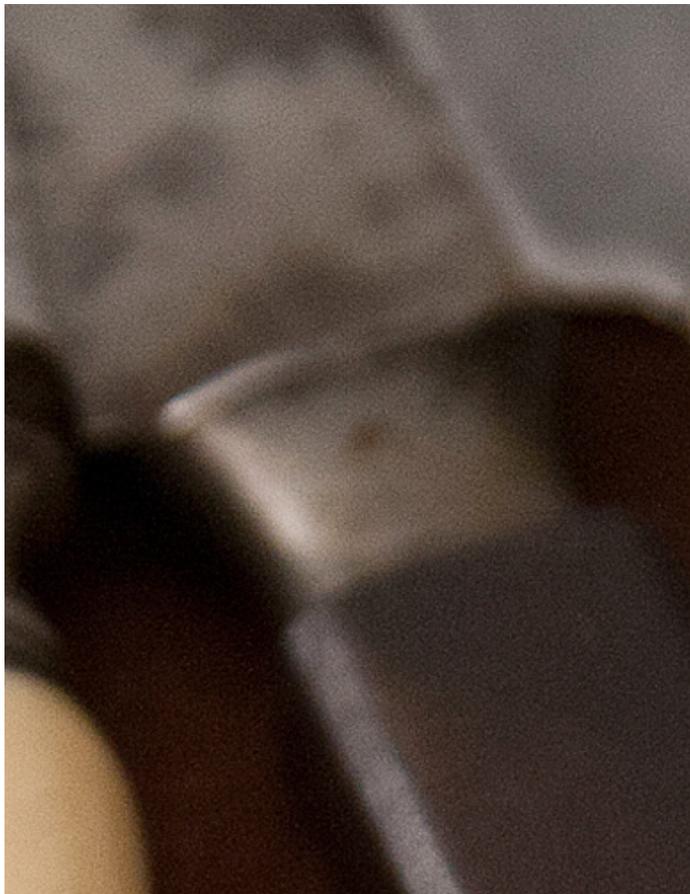
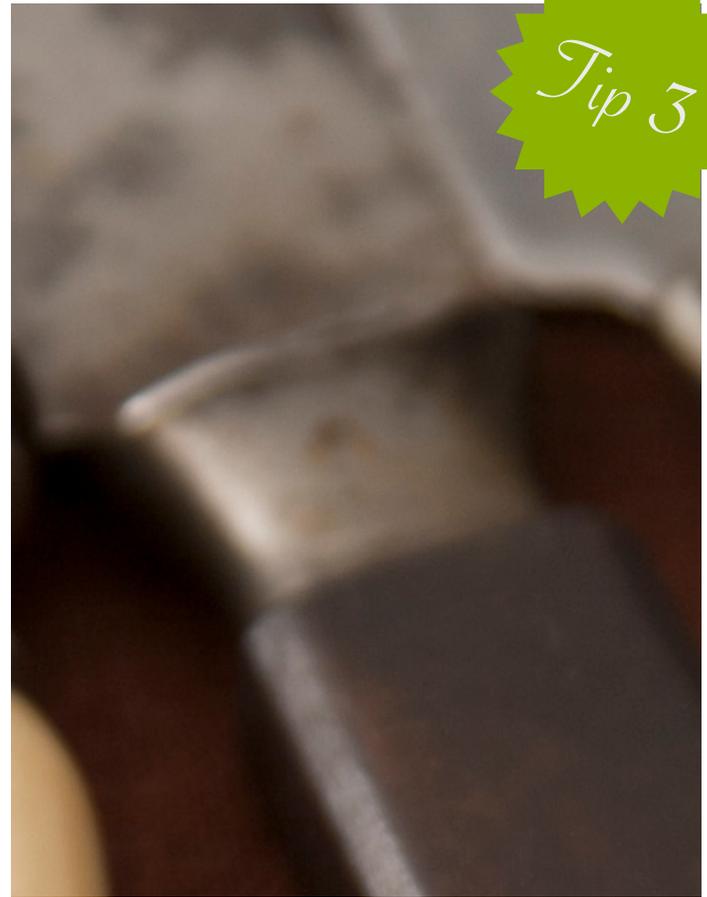
### 3. Keep Your ISO Low

Your **ISO** setting is telling the camera how much light is in the scene. If you are in a bright scene then you can use a lower ISO, like 100.

If you don't have a tripod and are shooting in low light, you need a high ISO, like 1600, or even higher, to let the camera know there isn't much light.

These two images are zoomed in so that you can see the details and the differences between the two ISO's.

The image to the right is with ISO 100.



#### Here is a high ISO - 1600

The problem shooting with a high ISO is that you will start to introduce digital noise into your image file, like what you see here to the left.

Getting digital noise, like what you see to the left, can be very difficult to correct later in editing. The digital noise is worse in the areas that are out of focus, so if you have shallow depth of field (lots of areas out of focus) this can be a problem. You will see this more in a printed version of the image.

Tip 4



#### 4. Do Not Hand Hold with a Slow Shutter Speed

The image on the left was shot with a [shutter speed](#) slower than 1/125 of a second. It is ruined by motion blur. On many cameras, the shutter speed is not labeled. On Canons, as you can see above, the shutter speed is the number to the left of the F-Stop. This number, “125” is actually a fraction, 1/125 of a second. If you are on a tripod, you can shoot as slow as you need to.

Check your manual to see what button or dial will enable you to change your shutter speed. You must be on Manual mode or on “TV” (shutter priority) mode.



## 5. Shoot the largest file you can



Not matter what kind of camera you have, you should always set it to the largest file it can produce. Why? Well, the goal is to create the best quality image you can, should you ever need to print this. Canon calls this setting “Quality” in the menu.



### RAW VS JPEG

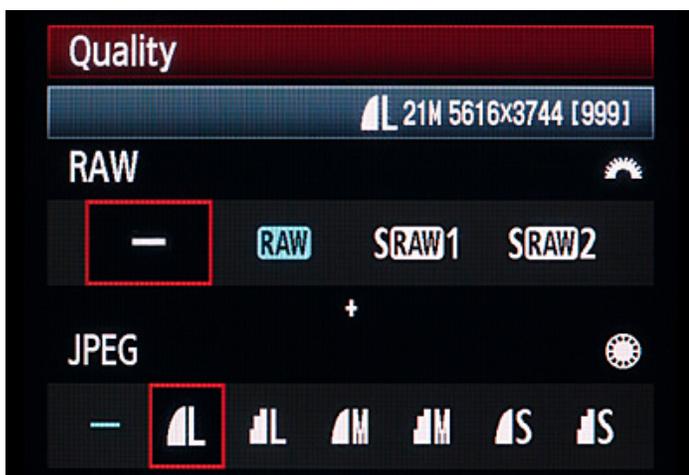
Some cameras shoot only JPEGS. Higher end cameras will give you an option of shooting a RAW file as well. RAW files can not be used by themselves. They must be processed using software like Photoshop or Lightroom.

Processing the file uses the RAW file to create a new file from it with your editing settings applied to the new image.



### Shoot Both RAW & JPEG If Possible

If you do not know how to work with RAW files, then plan ahead for when you might in the future and shoot both a RAW and JPEG file for now. This way you can use your JPEG now and then, later on when you start improving your photography and work with RAW files, you will be very happy you have those RAW files to go back to.



### If There's No RAW Option Then...

The lower end cameras do not shoot in RAW so just make sure that you are shooting the largest JPEG option you can. This way if you ever need a larger file or need to print the image, you know you have that for the future.

## Tip 6

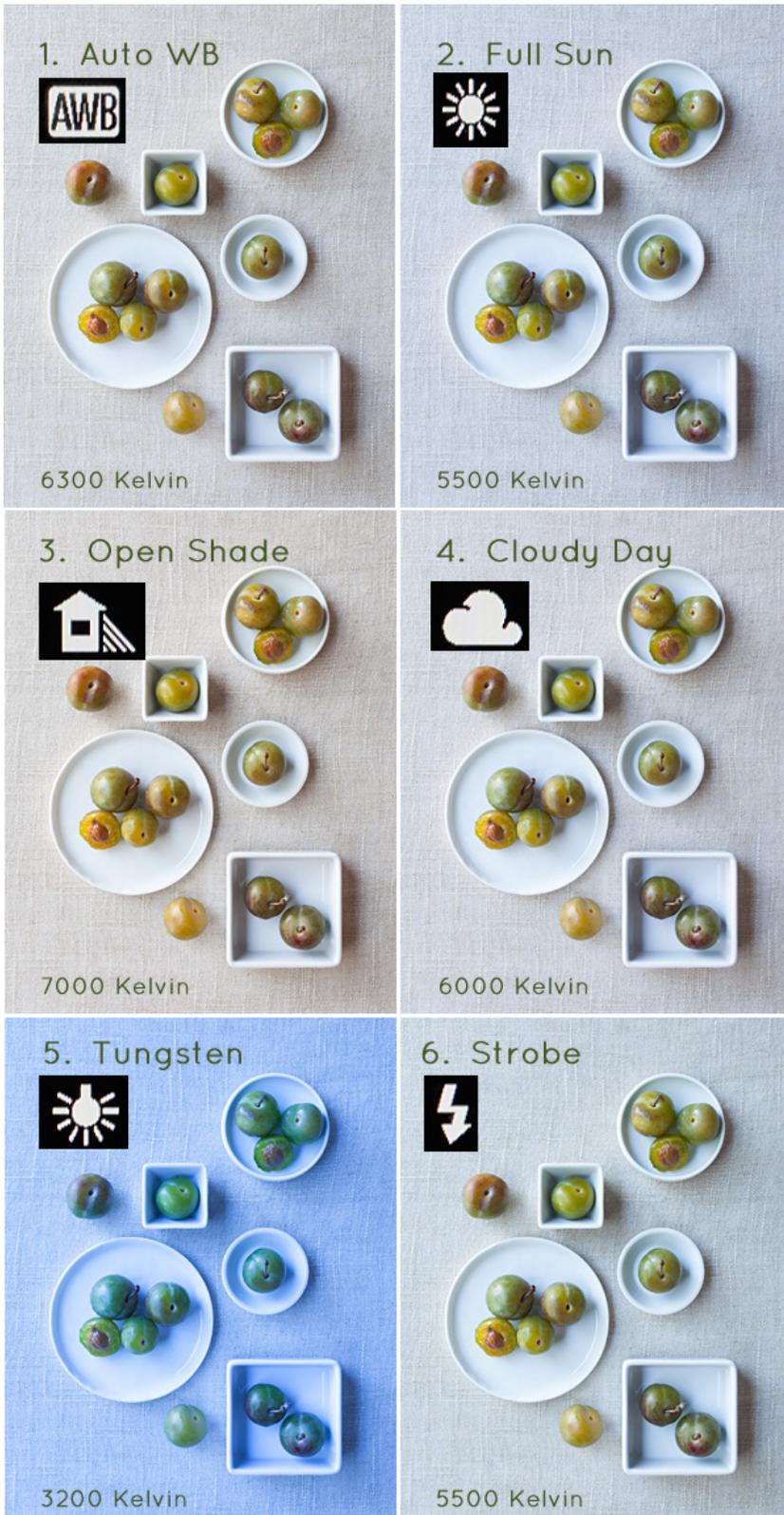
### 6. Adjust Your White Balance

If you're just learning photography and haven't yet mastered shooting in Manual mode, you're probably still shooting with your camera set to Auto White Balance. That works a lot of the time, however, there will be scenarios where Auto WB just doesn't look that good.

The [white balance setting](#) is telling the camera what kind of light you are shooting in. This is one of the most important camera settings for photography. It massively affects all the colors in the image.

One way to learn about white balance and what it does is to take some time and take a shot using several different white balance settings to see what looks the best, like you see to the left.

Once you understand white balance and how it works you can then use it creatively to make your food look even more fantastic than it did in person. I am always tweaking my white balance to warm up the colors in my food to make it look more appealing.



This picture was taken with natural light on a sunny day with blue sky. These six images represent the white balance setting that most cameras have. I took each picture with the WB setting that it is labeled with. Under the name of each WB setting is the symbol all cameras use for that setting. WB is measured in degrees Kelvin. That is the number on the bottom of each image. As you can see, there is a huge range of color just based on this one camera setting.



## 7. Check All Your Camera Settings Before Shooting

We've all done it. We get so excited to take a shot we barely look at the camera, take a picture and it's completely black, white, flaming blue, etc. One of our settings (or several) is not set right for the scene we are shooting in. Just take a few seconds to check each of the following:

1. Camera mode - I always shoot in manual
2. Make sure your ISO is not set to something like 6400, and set it to 100. If you are hand holding then this will need to be adjusted to your scene.
3. Decide your depth of field and pick your F-Stop.
4. Check to make sure the Exposure Compensation is not set to anything. That is the box near the middle with the scale of -2 through +2. I'm always hitting this setting by accident.
5. If you're hand holding, set your shutter to 1/125 of a second. If you're on a tripod, this can be whatever you want for a proper exposure.
6. Set the white balance to the light being used or use Auto WB.
7. Check your file size and make sure it's not tiny.



## 8. Learn How To Shoot In Manual Mode

Ok, so this isn't really a tip and is probably something you really don't want to hear, but the reality is that everything I shoot is in [manual mode](#) so that I can control everything the camera does.

I know if you're reading this you probably don't fully know yet how to shoot in manual mode. The goal here is to inspire you to learn. I want your blog / website to look gorgeous and I'm sure you do too.

Once you do learn how F-stops, shutter speeds, and ISO work, then you will be the master of getting the perfect exposure. I want you to dominate your camera! Tell it who's boss! But first...

Take baby steps - to learn shutter speeds shoot in "TV" mode (or if you have a Canon Rebel this mode might just be called "S" for shutter) and fool around with just the shutter speed to see how it works.

Next try "AV" mode to experiment with F-Stops to see how they work and how changing the F-Stops affect your depth of field.

Some cameras, like the Canon Rebel have different modes than those that are shown above, like a flower for macro photography, a person for portrait photography, etc. You can try putting your camera on the flower mode to see how that looks on your food.

# Shooting Tips

Tip 9



## 9. Crop Into The Plate

This shot was for a client. They were going to have several uses for the image, so I had to shoot the recipe in the horizontal format above so that they could crop the image according to their needs later.

I tend to crop into the plate a lot. This really brings your attention to the food and your props become secondary and simply help to tell the story. It's all about getting the viewer to look at your beautiful food that you just spent all that time making. Unless you are selling the plate - creatively crop it to frame your shot.



## 10. Shoot on a Tripod

When shooting food I am always on a tripod. I know a lot of you don't like them, but they completely free you up to work on your shot.

Tripods make [overhead shooting](#) much easier to work on as well. The image to the right shows my tripod head attachment called a side angle arm. Some new tripods have a way of tilting the center column for shooting.



Tip 10





Tip 11

## 11. With Long Exposures, Use Timer Delay or a Shutter Release Cable

When shooting with long exposures on a tripod, you still need to make sure you do not touch the camera when taking the picture or you can still get motion blur in your shots.

To avoid touching the camera when shooting you can either buy a shutter release, like you see to the right, or you can set your camera to take a picture after two seconds. This gives the camera enough time to settle before taking the shot. Look in your manual to see where this setting (timer delay) is on your camera.



## 12. Go Vertical!

Many bloggers take all their photos in a horizontal format. I understand why. It's a lot more comfortable to work that way. When shooting vertically all your settings are now on the side and if you're on a tripod you have to keep cranking your head over to see all the settings. Well, you just have to suffer through it!

Shooting vertically can give you nice depth in a photo from foreground to background. This also enables you to have large photos on your blog. Shooting vertically can give you room for text about the image, like a title.

Many sharing sites like Pinterest, are better with vertical shots so think about how this image will be shared and go from there. Mix up the images on your blog. Have some vertical photos and some horizontal ones as well. If you do everything the same way, it can get very boring.



Tip 12





### 13. Back Up and Zoom In - The Best Lens for Shooting Food

Several of my students have told me that when they are shooting they hear me yelling in their head, “Back up and zoom in!”. Many point and shoot cameras, when turned on, will set the lens to the widest focal length of the lens - very wide angle. So in class, the student is almost on top of the food they are shooting, which usually won't look as nice as when you zoom your lens in, back up, and then take the shot.

The longer the lens the more you can get a nice shallow depth of field in your shot (less things in focus). The wider lenses make things look more in focus.

Above is a shot where I had the camera on a tripod and I used a three different focal lengths. Notice the shallow depth of field with the 100mm lens. You can get a similar look with a 50mm lens if you get closer to your food, however, you do not have as much flexibility with the space around your set as it will show more background. With the 100mm you can get away with showing less background in the shot so you will not need as much surface area.

I *do* use the 50mm or the 35mm for large table settings of food where there's many items that I want in focus. I also use the wider lenses for overhead shots. This way I don't have to be on a ladder working overhead.

Generally speaking, I'd say I use the 100mm lens about 90% of the time.

## 14. Bracket Your Exposure

To find the perfect exposure, do what's called an exposure bracket. A bracket is a series of shots of the same image but with different settings. When starting a shot with natural light, the first thing I do is an exposure bracket. This way, once I have the correct exposure, I can accurately tweak other settings, like the white balance.

If you don't have the right exposure and start adjusting other settings, you won't get accurate results.

To the left you can see a bracket I did with the purple carrots. I put a green box around the exposure I like the best.

I do my brackets in natural light by setting my f-stop to the depth of field I want, in this case that would be f 4.5. I always set my ISO to 100 as I'm always on a tripod. Then I simply take a series of shots where I only change the shutter speed.

I always shoot tethered so I see the results on my computer right away.

After I pick the exposure I like, I set the shutter speed to that exposure, then I finish working on the shot.



Exposure is F4.5 at "5 sec (half sec)



shutter is "4 sec



shutter is "3 sec



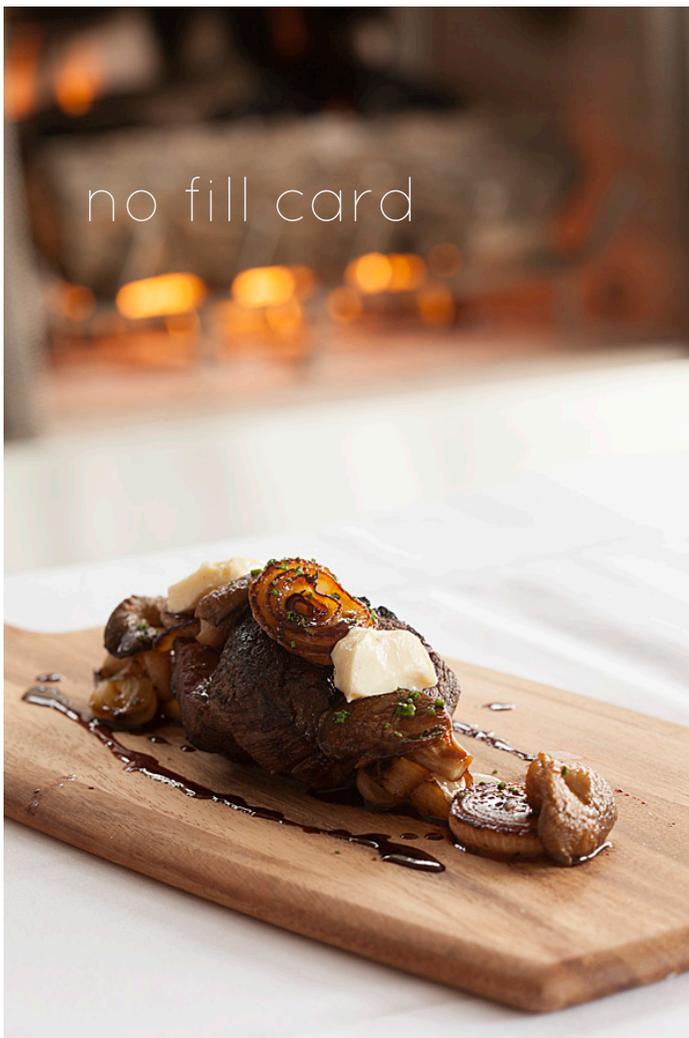
shutter is 1/4 sec



shutter is 1/5 sec



shutter is 1/6 sec



Behind the scenes photo by [Monique Ozimkowski](#)

## 15. My Friend Fill

One of the easiest, quickest tips to really improve your light is to [add a fill card](#) on the shadow side of your set.

A fill card is any white card that is placed just outside the frame of your shot. This white card bounces light back into your set on the shadow side. In the shot above you can see the before and after and what a huge difference the fill card makes.

You can see the fill card immediately to the left here in the shot where I am painting the fillet (future tip).

Tip 16

## 16. Do Not Use Overhead Light - Use Side Light Instead

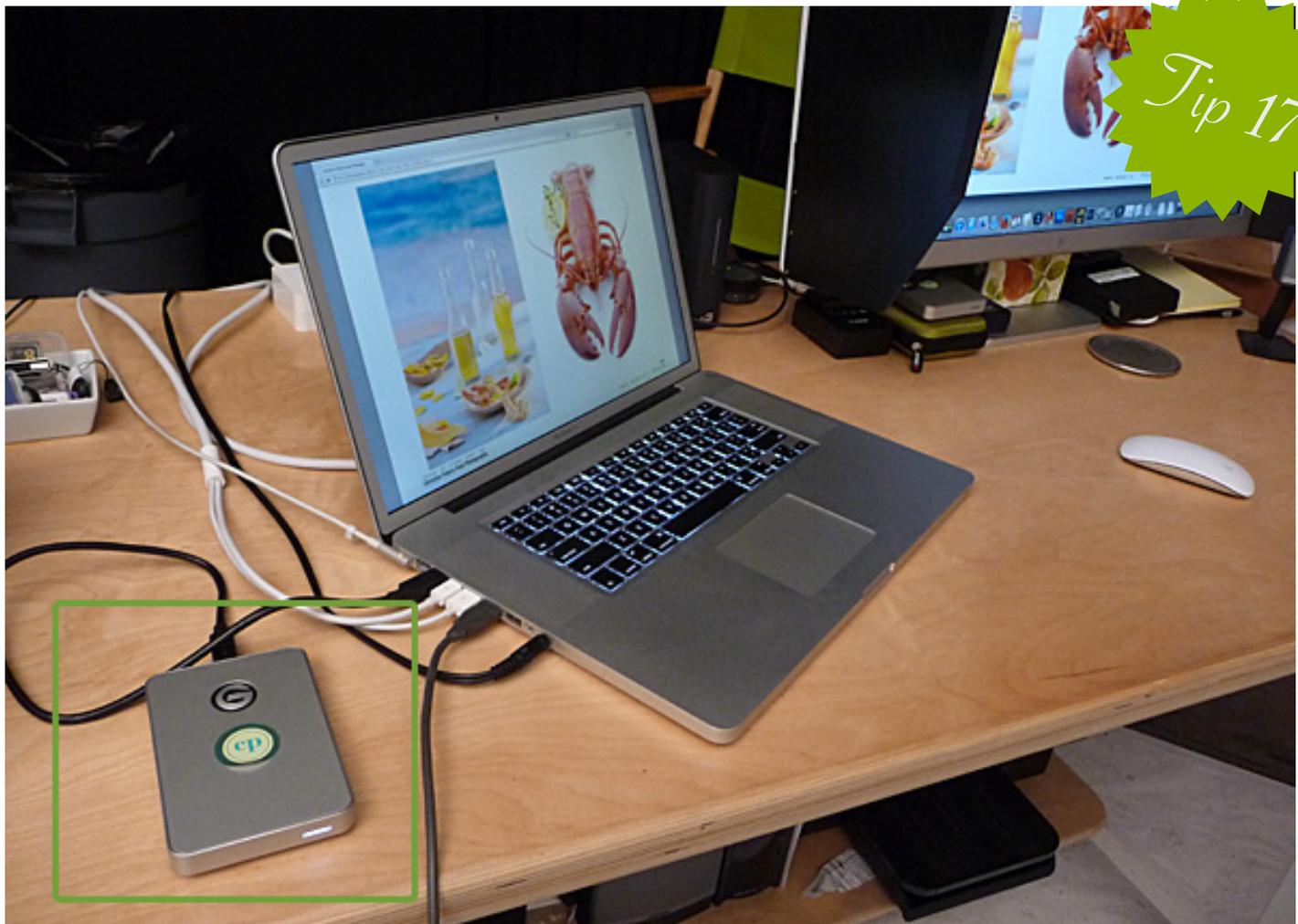
If you're shooting after dark and have to use artificial light - do not use your overhead kitchen lights for your food shoot.

The shot to the right was taken with a tungsten light (the one below) that had a soft box on it. This shot was taken with one light and one fill card - that's it.

This light was made by Westcott - it's called the [uLite 2-light kit with free backdrop](#). Currently on Amazon it's \$200 + shipping. Its a great kit and it's what we use in the [Studio Light Photography class](#).



Here is the set of the image on this page - photo taken by [Bowen Close](#). You can see the soft box light on the left and the fill card on set.



## 17. Back Up Your Stuff!!!

The saying is: "It's not if your drive will die, it's when". OK so this isn't really a photography tip, however, it's so important it has to be said.

I was teaching a class, and at the end of the day I was processing all the files we shot in class, while making copies of files for students and had several applications open at once. The screen flashed white, had strange huge lines on it, then froze.

Luckily, because I was backing up files as we were shooting them - I lost nothing. The actual CPU motherboard fried. All I had to do was get the backup drive, hook it up to my laptop and whala! Everything was fine.

I use a program each time I shoot - it's called [ChronoSync](#). I copy the folder I'm shooting tethered into by putting it onto the backup drive. Chronosync can automate it, or you can simply take your folder of work and drop it onto your backup drive to copy it.

Please start doing this now, if you haven't already.

# Propping Tips

Tip 18

## 18. Please Use Props

Props can really set the scene for you. My good friend and prop stylist [Amy Paliwoda](#) says to think of your image as a story, not a novel, but a quick, short little story.

[Your props](#) are your supporting cast in this story. They should not distract from the food at all - but should enhance it.

Once you place a prop in your shot, take a picture and then move it around and take another shot. Find the perfect spot for your props this way.



Plate is too busy



## 19. Use Simple Props

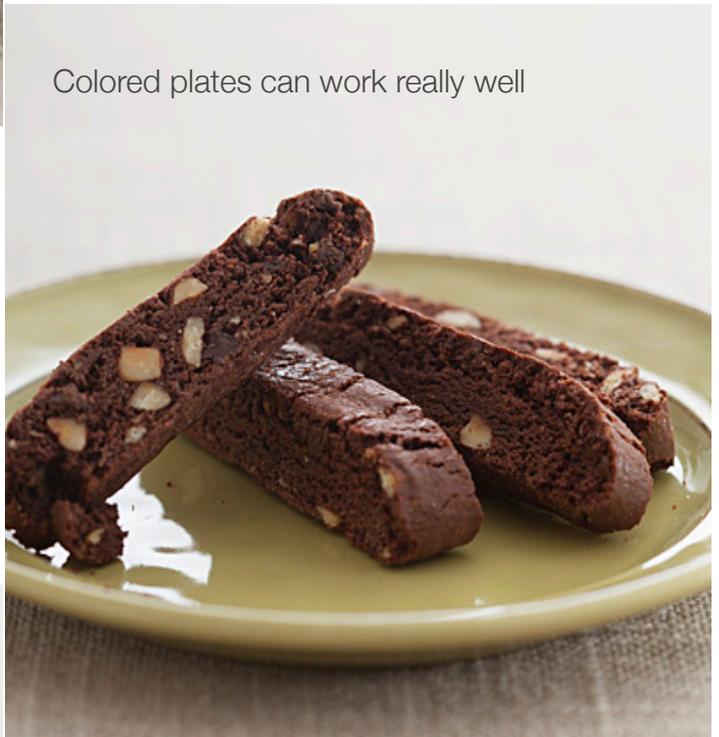
Notice that in all my food shots there are never any plates with crazy patterns on them. The pattern can be very distracting. We're selling the food - not the plate.

Before placing any other props, we pick the plate we are going to shoot on first.

### Maybe Bring In Color

We'll test several plates to see what we like the most. Colored plates can be a great way to bring color into your shot when the food might not have a lot of color in it to begin with.

Colored plates can work really well



### White Doesn't Mean Boring

I'd say I shoot on white plates about 80% of the time. I really like using plates that have a texture to them so they aren't just flat white plates. It's all about what will compliment your food the best.

Note: we always use smaller plates, like salad plates for our shots - again, make the food stand out.

## 20. Become a Prop Hunter!

This shot was styled by prop stylist, [Amy Paliwoda](#) (she and I teach [classes together](#)). She jokes that she's a hoarder, really though, she has a fabulous collection of props.

I love shopping for [that perfect prop](#). I still find great props at thrift stores. I also use Ebay and Etsy a lot. The keywords I use are; antique, vintage, and primitive for whatever item I am hunting for - "vintage silverware".

Here's some other great places: [Canvas Home Store](#), [Serena & Lilly](#), [One Kings Lane](#), and for more contemporary props we do love Crate and Barrel and also their more contemporary store, CB2. Also, don't forget your local flea markets.

Tip 20



## 21. Bring in Color with Fabric

If you are still struggling with props, you can bring interest to your shot by introducing a color that really compliments your food.

When choosing a color fabric, keep in mind that the color could shift when you shoot it. There could be whiteners and chemical brighteners that do strange things digitally.

When selecting a color, get a few options. You will be shocked at how a fabric can shift, and its *not* predictable.

Put down your fabric choices on your set before anything else, and then take a shot with an empty plate on it to see how the color reacts to your light.



## My Fabric Wall

This is my fabric collection at my studio. I sometimes have to ship fabrics to jobs in other cities so I store them in these plastic bags from The Container Store.

These are just the ones we use the most. There are many more upstairs in my other prop storage area.

Tip 22

# Food Styling Tips



## 22. Keep Food Moist

It's crucial to keep your food moist for your shot. On veggies, I use glycerin and water, mixed 50% each (as you can see on my spray bottle above). I spray it on and use my hands to rub it in. You can use water but you'll have to keep reapplying it.

For meats and poultry, right before we shoot we'll paint oil (veggie oil or olive oil) on it to make it have a slight sheen, but not look too oily as we don't want anything to look greasy.

On the left, I'm painting melted butter onto the filet mignon as it was already there on the board.

Behind the scenes photo by Monique Ozimkowski

## 23. Keep Food Fresh

When working with fresh produce, you have to be careful not to let it oxidize and turn brown. Some foods turn extremely fast.

Give those foods a bath in a heavy dose of Accent or Fruit Fresh mixed with water. I use about a tablespoon per two cups of water. This is basically MSG and it works to keep things looking fresh. Don't have these handy? - you can also use lemon juice but, you'll have to keep reapplying it. With the MSG products, once the food is soaked, you're good to go.

Tip 23



## Use Pam on Greens, Meat, and Poultry

Another trick to making food *look* as if it's fresh is to hose it down with Pam. I know, sounds weird but it can make lettuces look nice, luscious, and green. We use it on all kinds of food items.

For loads more food styling tips and tricks, my good friend and food stylist [Denise Vivaldo](#) has written the bible for food styling. It's called [The Food Stylist's Handbook](#). If you are a food blogger, this is a must have.



## 24. Use Kitchen Bouquet on Proteins & to Make Fake Wine

This chicken to the right was only cooked long enough to tighten the skin. Then the stylist painted it with a mixture of Kitchen Bouquet, water, and a little bit of dish soap. The dish soap helps the mixture stick to the bird as it's greasy.



Tip 24



### Kitchen Bouquet

I remember my mom using Kitchen Bouquet to brown the gravy at Thanksgiving when I was a kid.

We use it for so many things with food photography.

To the left you can see my “magical Chardonnay”. I take a wooden skewer and just barely dip the end into the KB. With this glass being in the background and out of focus a little bit, you’d never know it wasn’t wine.

## 25. Build Your Food On Set

This soup was very carefully put together on set. It was styled and photographed by Suzie Martel in our [Food Styling and Photo Techniques class](#). Suzie shot this with a Canon 5D Mark ii with a 100mm macro lens.

She very carefully built the topping above some lucite cubes that are hidden in the soup. You can see her toppings very carefully organized in the bottom picture.

As she placed toppings onto the lucite cubes, she would look through the camera and take shots every step along the way.

Tip 25



Tip 26



## 26. Prop Up Your Food

In order to get that perfect shot, you sometimes have to get food to stay in certain positions that it won't naturally stay in.

To the left, you can see I used blue poster putty to hold up the strawberries along with straight pins to hold down the green tops.

We'll also use wooden blocks under all kinds of things too. These wooden blocks below are from a child's toy set.



A shallow bowl filled with a mix of green and purple leafy vegetables, with a wooden spoon resting inside. The background is dark and out of focus.

## 27. Use Fresh Herbs for Garnish Whenever You Can

Fresh herbs can completely change a shot and be the perfect finishing touch. When using fresh herbs, don't place them until right before everything else is where you want it. Fresh herbs die very quickly, so you only have a few minutes before they start to wilt. The last thing you want is to have wilted herbs in your shot.





## Keep Fresh Herbs in Ice Water

Whenever possible, I buy fresh, potted herbs for food shooting. Putting fresh herbs in ice water is a great trick that chefs use. This will keep them nice and perky till you're ready to shoot.

Once on set, if you did ice your herbs, they will last longer on set before wilting.



# Post Production

Tip 29

The screenshot shows the GIMP website homepage. At the top, there's a navigation bar with the GIMP logo and the text "GNU Image Manipulation Program". Below this is a large banner featuring the GIMP 2.8 logo and a "Download" button. To the right of the banner is a sidebar with links for "News", "Screenshots", "Features", "Downloads", "Documentation", "Get Involved", "Plug-in Registry", "GIMP Development", and "Donations". The "Donations" section shows a Flattr widget with 4738 contributions and a Bitcoin widget. Below the banner, there's a paragraph of text describing GIMP as a freely distributed software for tasks like photo retouching, image composition, and image authoring. At the bottom, there's a footer text stating that this is the official GIMP website and it contains information about downloading, installing, using, and enhancing the software.

The screenshot shows the PicMonkey website homepage. At the top, there's a navigation bar with the PicMonkey logo and the text "Photo editing made of win". Below this are icons for "Edit", "Touch Up", "Design", and "Collage". A "Sign in" button is also visible. The main content area features a large image of a young boy in a superhero costume, with the text "Fearless photo embetterment" and "Transform your photos with fast, easy, gorgeous effects." Below this is an "Edit a photo" button and a link to "Get beginner tips >". A "Free week of Royale!" promotion is also visible.

The screenshot shows the PicMonkey photo editor interface. On the left, there's a font selection menu with various fonts listed, including "Arial Black", "Arial", "Tahoma", "Trebuchet MS", "Varela Round", "Verdana", "Geo Sans Light", "Quicksand", "Poetsen One", "Impact", and "Francois One". The main area shows a photo of a plate of food (cheese, pears, and berries) with a text box overlaid. The text box has a color picker and a font selection dropdown. The text in the box is "© 2014 Food Photography Blog".

## 29. Edit Your Work

Its amazing now how many editing tools you can find, for free!

[www.gimp.org](http://www.gimp.org) is a free program you can download. They have a manual you can download, and tons of online tutorials under the "documentation" link on their site.

Another online editor that you can very easily use is [www.picmonkey](http://www.picmonkey). Here, you simply upload your image and use several tools for editing, then you export your file back to your desktop.

## 30. Use Online Tutorials For Improving Your Photography



I've been using Photoshop since 1990. I started on Photoshop version 2. OK, yeah, I'm aging myself. My point is, though I use Photoshop every single day, I still feel like I only know about 1/10 that it has to offer.

There are some really great monthly membership websites that have hours and hours of excellent training content for Photoshop, LightRoom, and anything else you'd like to learn in photography. You can join for a month, learn what you need at the moment, and then cancel until you need it again. I do this whenever I need it.

Here are my favorites:

[www.lynda.com](http://www.lynda.com)

[www.kelbyone.com](http://www.kelbyone.com)

Here are some great websites for beginners:

[www.digital-photography-school.com](http://www.digital-photography-school.com)

[www.exposureguide.com](http://www.exposureguide.com)

A fabulous website that will teach you to be a pro food blogger:

[www.foodbloggerpro.com](http://www.foodbloggerpro.com)



# About the Author

## Christina Peters

I have been taking pictures since I was 8 years old. I grew up in Newark, Delaware, then moved to California in 1989 to attend Art Center College of Design where I received my BFA in photography in 1993 and have been shooting ever since. I started with product photography and then concentrated in food photography for the last 12 years.

In 2011 I started teaching food photography classes at my studio in Marina Del Rey, California. Please check out the classes here: [MDR Photography Classes](#). These classes are designed for food bloggers, chefs and other culinary professionals and I teach them with other work colleagues of mine.

Our current line up of classes:  
[Natural Light Food Photography](#)  
[Food Styling and Photo Techniques](#)  
[Studio Light Food Photography](#)

Some of my commercial photography clients are: Arby's, Baja Fresh, Bumble Bee Tuna, Burger King, Cici's Pizza, Dominos Pizza, Kraft Foods, McDonald's, Pinkberry Frozen Yogurt, Taco Bell, and Weight Watchers along with several ad agencies, design firms, and magazines. You can see my commercial work here: [www.ChristinaPeters.com](http://www.ChristinaPeters.com)



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