

## Tripod Alternatives

Stan Johnston, 6/04

I have a confession to make. It's my dirty little secret in photography: I rarely use a tripod. I know I ought to. I know I'd get better pictures if I did. But let's face it: tripods are big and heavy to carry around, and cumbersome and time-consuming to set up and use. So when you can't or won't use a tripod, here are some second-best alternatives to consider:

1. A monopod is not as steady as a tripod, but it's a lot more steady than hand-holding.
2. Rest your camera and lens on a beanbag. If you don't have a beanbag, in an emergency, try a sweater, your lunch sack, or a crumpled newspaper.
3. Use fast film and a fast lens to allow a fast enough shutter speed for hand-holding. (The traditional rule of thumb is that the shutter speed in seconds should be the reciprocal of the focal length in millimeters, e.g., 1/200 sec. with a 200 mm lens.)
4. Get a camera or lens with an "image stabilization" feature, to allow hand-holding at a slower shutter speed than otherwise possible. They claim you can safely go up to 3 stops slower, i.e. 8 times slower. That would mean shooting at 1/25 sec. instead of 1/200 sec., for example.
5. Use flash to stop camera motion as well as subject motion. I find this often works well for macro-photography.
6. Hold the camera close, with your elbows tight to your body. Hold your breath and squeeze the shutter with a slow steady motion.
7. Brace the camera tightly against a sturdy object like a lamp post or a hand railing.
8. Set the camera gently on any handy surface, like a picnic table or a park bench. Use folded scrap paper as a shim to angle it up or down as necessary to frame the shot. Use the camera's self-timer, or a cable release or wireless release, to avoid moving the camera when taking the picture.

When working under marginal conditions, take several shots. With luck, maybe one of them will turn out tolerably sharp.