Table-Top Flash Photography

Table-Top photography is a great way of capturing images when the weather is miserable but does require a few simple steps to be taken to achieve good results. Below are some suggestions.

1 Camera Settings

There are some camera settings that need to be set before commencing the picture taking, these are as follows:

The camera needs to be put into **Manual mode** so that the user can determine and control the amount of light hitting the sensor. Other modes such as Av or Tv make automatic adjustments when pressing the shutter, Manual allows the user to set both the Shutter speed and Aperture to suit the conditions.

The **Shutter speed** needs to be set to the camera's flash sync speed, typically any speed between 1/100 and 1/160 sec will do the job.

The **Aperture** setting will depend on the amount of light falling on the subject, try setting at f8.

The **ISO** should ideally be set to the native (highest quality) setting, typically 100. Rather than increase the ISO you can increase the amount of light or open up the aperture.

Single point **Focus** is also a good basis as this allows you to pinpoint the area that you want sharpest.

Other settings are largely a personal choice and can be amended later.

2 Flash Settings

Typically the **Flash** will be used off-camera to provide directional lighting to the subject and although many modern camera / flash combinations can be set automatically they are best used in manual. The Flash unit will typically have both ETTL and Manual and it should be set to Manual for this purpose. There will also be buttons to vary the power of the flash and I suggest setting this to ½ power as a start. A combination of flashes can be used to light the subject, limited only by the number of flashes and triggers available.

3 Flash Triggers

Communication between Camera and Flash can be via remote triggers which allow the flash to positioned in a suitable place to create the desired effects. Ensure that the codes on both the transmitter and receiver(s) are set to the same combination and slide all of the switches to the *Flash* position. *Note: One transmitter can be used to fire several receivers provided that the codes are set to the same values.*

4 Putting it all together

The diagram below shows a simple set-up using two remotely triggered flashguns to light a subject.
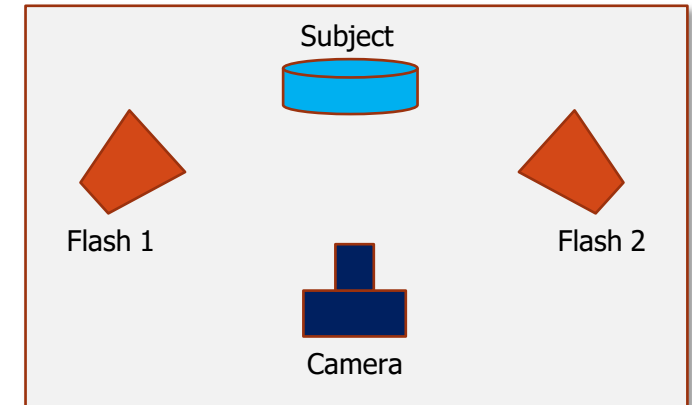
When shooting macro or close-up, the depth of field (how much is in focus) can be very small so selecting a suitable point to focus on is critical to a successful image. Setting a smaller Aperture (f22) will give more depth of field but will also reduce the amount of light on the sensor, thus underexposing the image. Use the camera's histogram to assess the exposure ensuring there are no burnt-out areas on the image. Careful thought should also be given to selecting a suitable background that keeps the attention on the subject matter.

Close-up detail of a decaying Lily

Praying Mantis