



## Review: Mike Moats Macro Light Control Kit

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The [Mike Moats Macro Light Control Kit](#) includes a 24-inch Wimberly™ Plamp and two 14-inch Westcott™ Illuminator Reflector Panels - one is silver on one side and white on the other, and the other is a translucent white diffuser. It also includes the *Finding Character in Nature* ebook by Mike. I went out for a leisurely "test drive" on a lovely - and hot and humid - July morning.

At first, I felt like I was carrying around too much equipment. Tripod and camera in one hand, plamp and filters in the other - useful or not, I had to find a way to carry everything more easily. So, I clamped the Plamp onto my tripod, and hung the reflector panels from it. Now, I could carry everything with one hand. Problem solved. I chose a small thistle, and got to work. Lucky for me, I had my trusty side-kick along to document the process - thanks for helping out, Jay!



First, I set up my tripod then put the Plamp to work positioning the chosen thistle just where I wanted it. I'll go into more detail about that fabulous little tool later - for now, indulge me while I go into some detail about controlling the light.

I deliberately chose a location in the sun because I wanted to put those illuminator panels to work. The backlighting was delicious but the intensity of the light made it difficult to capture the entire dynamic range with a single exposure. I wanted to capture good detail in the shadow areas without blowing out the bright areas, and that's tough to do with a shot like this unless you happen to have a handy little reflector panel hanging from your tripod! The silver reflector bounced light from the sun onto the front of the thistle, enhancing all those prickly details. The back-lighting outlines the plant, without blowing out the highlights. Perfect.



I took a few comparison shots to show the dramatic difference a reflector or diffuser can make - take a look at the images below.



Here's a shot taken without any reflector or diffuser. Notice the dark background. The camera can't handle the entire dynamic range, so the photographer has to choose between capturing detail in the highlights, or capturing detail in the shadows.



For this shot, I used the silver reflector to bounce light onto the flower and the shadowed background. You can see quite a bit more detail back there, and the shadows on the flower aren't so dark. You still get the backlit effect. This reflector is

great for dramatic lighting.

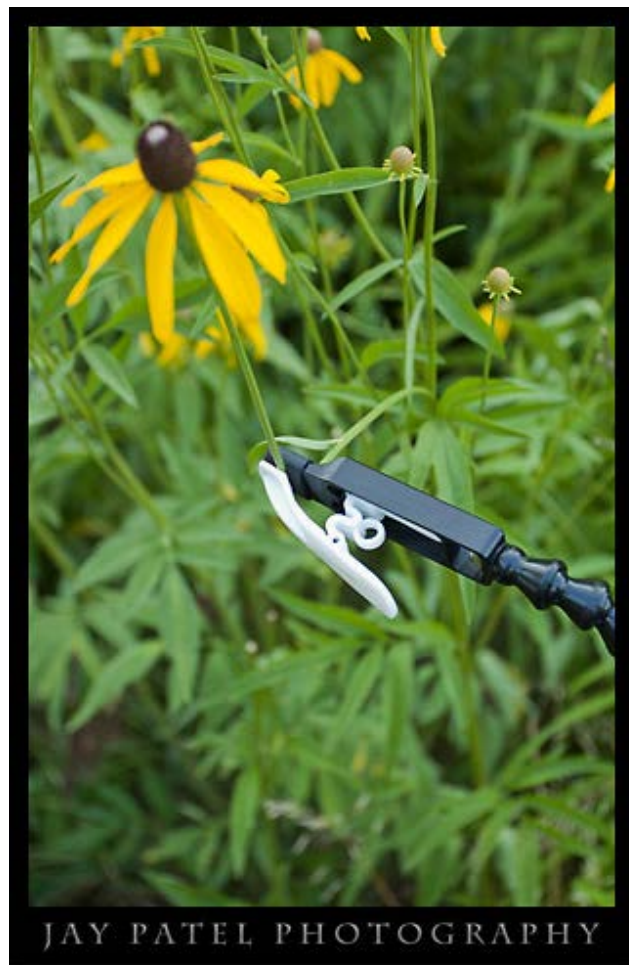


For this last shot, I held the diffused panel just behind and to the right of the flower to filter the strong, directional sunlight. I also increased my shutter speed slightly to get the exposure just right in the camera. Notice how soft and even the light is in this image. The diffuser is perfect when you want a more subtle lighting effect.

The best thing about these little panels is that you can really extend your shooting options and expand your time frame for getting good photos. It's no longer necessary to confine your photography to times when the light is perfect. And there's no need to purchase an expensive flash unit for spotlighting your subject. (Of course, if you already have a flash unit, you could use the diffuser panel to soften it and remove harsh glare, or the reflector to bounce the flash for softer, indirect light. The options are endless.)



Now, let's get back to the Plamp. This deceptively simple little tool is enormously helpful. Any photographer who has tried to capture a plant portrait knows how hard it is to isolate a subject in a weedy field or an overgrown garden. For a clean composition, I needed my pretty yellow flower to stay just the right distance from my lens, at the just the right angle. I also needed to separate it from its brothers so that I could isolate it with a shallow depth of field. I've abandoned shots like this in the past because I couldn't get the plant to stay where I wanted itâ€ this time, it wasn't a problem. You should have seen me grinning like an idiot out there.



The padded clip did no damage to any flowers I shot that morning, so the birds and the butterflies weren't offended and the Plamp can be used to hold a reflector or diffuser too - you can even use it to hold other plants out the frame. For those who like a shorter arm, the Plamp snaps apart pretty easily. You can actually remove some of the little ball-jointed sections to shorten it. Personally, I like it as it is.

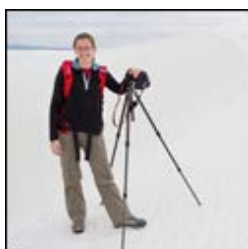


Mike's kit is perfect for macro photography. The illuminator panels can be used together or separately, and when I fold them up, they take up very little room in my camera bag. They're extremely lightweight and easy to carry, too. I store the Plamp in my bag by folding it into a tight little coil. Everything in the kit seems to be very sturdy, and I don't see any reason why these tools won't last for many years to come.

My only regret? I wish I had another kit. Two Plamps are better than one - one to hold the reflector, and one for the flower. And Jay and I are already fighting over those reflector panels.

The Mike Moats Macro Kit is available at the [NPN/OPG Store](#).

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**Varina Patel**, with her husband Jay, are professional nature photographers and frequent contributors here at NPN. To see more of Varina's fabulous work, visit her website at [photographybyvarina.com](http://photographybyvarina.com).

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