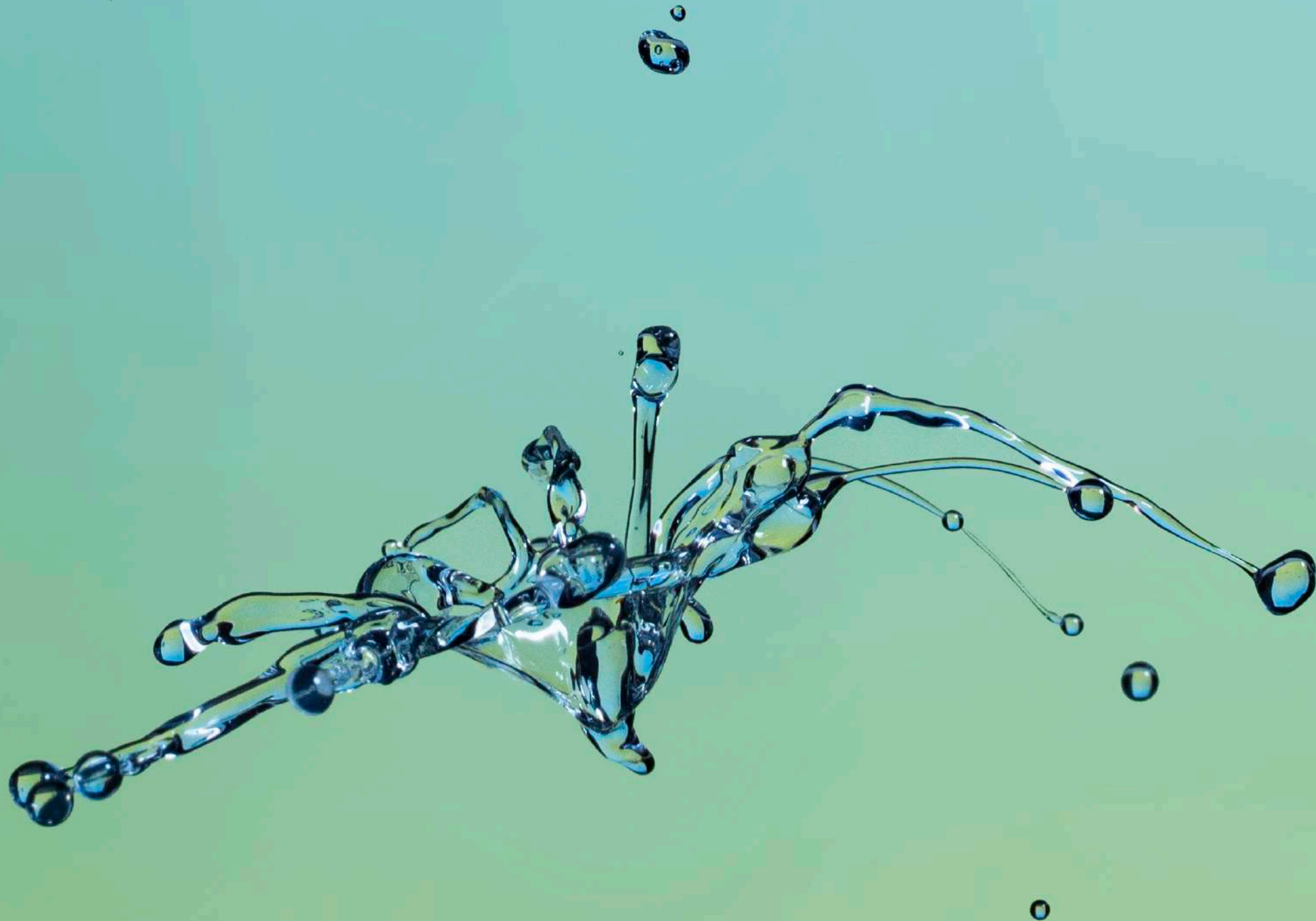

GETTING CREATIVE WITH OBJECTS FOUND IN AND AROUND THE HOME

Quick Guide
Written by Tobie Schalkwyk



Before you dive into this guide, here's a few other free resources to help you learn photography:



What is Your #1 Photography Killer?

Take this 30 second quiz to find out the #1 thing holding your photography back.

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3 Free Photography Cheat Sheets

Grab 3 free photography cheat sheets that will help you understand the basics.

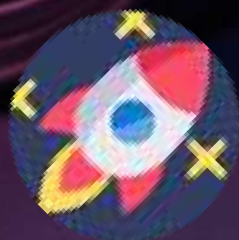
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INTRODUCTION

I don't think there's a more relevant topic to write about than this one, at a time when a lot of us are being 'locked down' – either by the authorities or by personal choice. Lockdowns can easily become torture, or you can choose to let it be fun.

How on earth can a lockdown be 'fun'? Well, if you're a photographer, then all you have to do is get creative! Perhaps you choose not to go out to public places to take photos, but there are a lot of options with interesting objects all around you at home!

In this guide we're going to have a look at how to get creative with objects found in and around your home.



Recommended Reading: Want to expand your shooting skills and master photography? Grab our set of 65 beautifully designed and printable Action Cards that will give you over 200 photography assignments to help you take your photography to the next level. [Check it out here.](#)

CREATIVE ACTIVITY #1: DROPLETS

All of us have water around the house. It's no wonder then that quite a few photographers have tried their hand at this fun genre of photography.

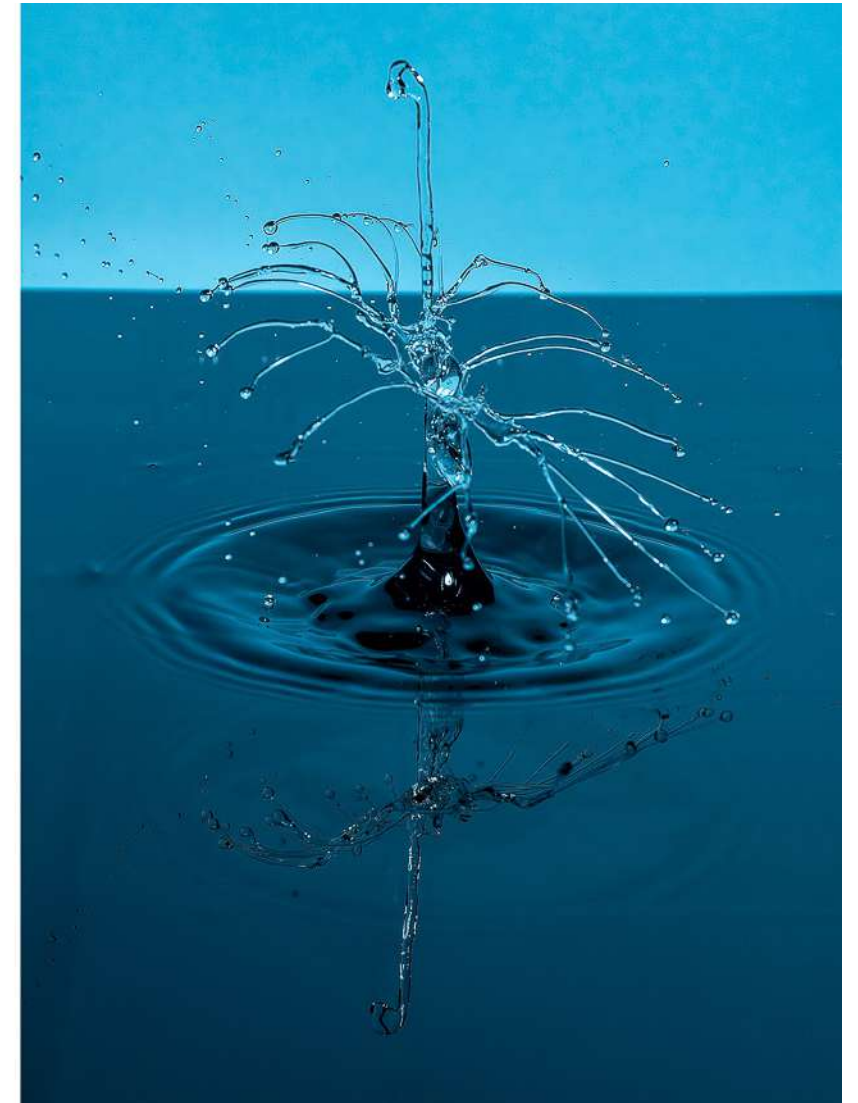
Liquid drops hitting a liquid surface are probably one of the most interesting things to photograph. Not only because each drop creates the most amazing patterns, but also because no two drops create the same splash – ever!

Water is only one media at your disposal. You can (and should) also go for oil, shampoo, milk, a water/soap mixture - in fact any type of liquid. Each type, individually or mixed, will react differently and thus create different types of splashes (for example, milk dropping into milk will react differently than milk dropping into coffee).

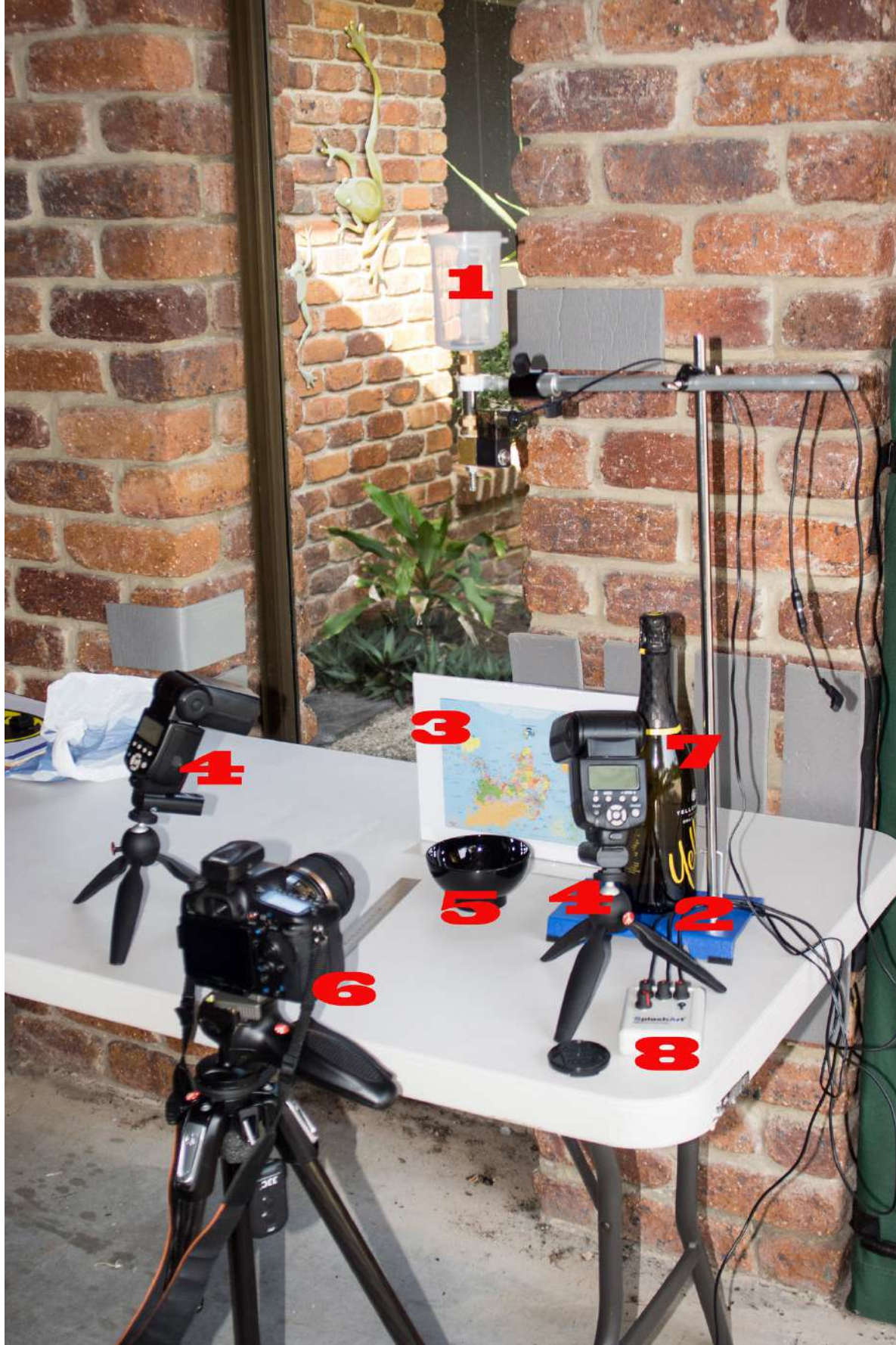
This genre of photography can be tried with almost no 'kit' (and a lot of patience for trial and error) or with kits specifically developed to trigger your camera's shutter at the moment the droplet hits the water. So, what is required?

BASIC REQUIREMENTS

- A camera with manual exposure and focus
- A speedlite to freeze the splash in mid-air
- A container to hold the liquid
- A droplet regulator to regulate the interval between drops. This could be anything from a little tap (as used in fish tank piping), a teat, a hole in a plastic bag, or an eyedropper, etc.
- Patience (wink!)



Photographs by David Chesterfield



Photograph by David Chesterfield

Sounds easy, right? Well, maybe – depending on your amount of patience and your innovative spirit! It should be quite clear that the ‘patience’ side is what is going to make or break your droplet photography venture. So, if you can fix that, then you’re in for much more fun than frustration.

So how do you do it? By triggering the flash and shutter at the moment (or perhaps a split second after) the droplet hits the liquid surface. And how do you do *that*? Well, I resorted to guidance from the king of droplet photography (in my book): David Chesterfield.

Let’s look at one of his setups to see how he goes about photographing droplets. Here’s his gear list:

- 1) Mariotte Syphon on 12v solenoid
- 2) Stand
- 3) Backdrop (an acrylic A4 document holder, allowing for a change in backdrops by simply changing the paper in the holder)
- 4) Flash units and wireless triggers mounted on two small tripods
- 5) Drop receptacle
- 6) Camera mounted on tripod
- 7) Ballast
- 8) Drop controller

David uses one or more of the following components in his droplet shoots. If you can afford it, it will certainly help you get the most from this genre of photography:

- MIOPS Splash Water Drop Kit (<https://www.miops.com/products/splash-water-drop-kit> – available for \$149)
- Splashart Kit (<https://www.phototrigger.co.uk/> – available for £179)
- Dropcontroller (<https://www.dropcontroller.com> – available for \$199)

Going into detail on how to use each of these components is beyond the scope of this guide. Typical to all popular hobbies, though, there is quite a lot of supportive information available on the internet.

Tips:

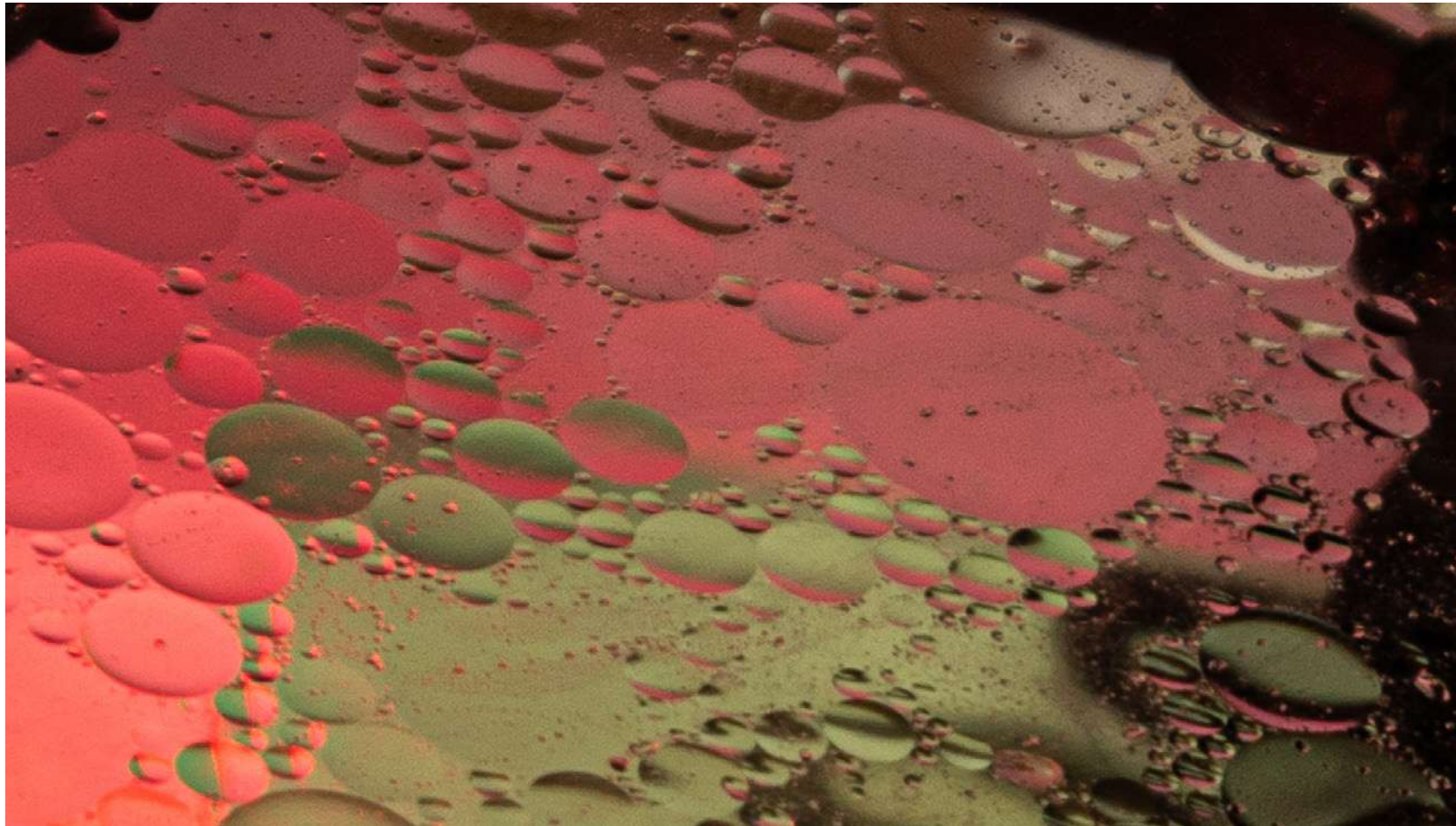
- To set your focus, place an object like an iron bolt in the middle of your drop receptable. Focus on it and then switch to manual focus in order to keep focus during the shoot. Adjust your dropper's position until your droplets fall right on top of the bolt.
- Use the fastest possible shutter speed and narrow aperture (f/11 and narrower).
- Thicken water with Xanthum gum. It slows down the water reaction time and creates a wider variety of water shapes.
- If you use multiple speedlites, ensure they are set to the same power setting in order to avoid a blurring effect.



Key Lesson: The setup for droplet photography can be very simple or quite complex. A bit of extra effort (and sacrificing some of your hard-earned bucks) can simplify the process by quite a margin, though. Use the internet to your advantage. There's no need to reinvent the wheel. Study other photographers' processes and utilize whatever works for you.



Photographs by David Chesterfield



Photograph by Tobie Schalkwyk

CREATIVE ACTIVITY #2: LIQUID MIXES

Perhaps you've had a look at the droplet photography section above and it made your tummy turn. You feel a bit overwhelmed, or perhaps your budget won't allow a state-of-the-art kit to make life easier for you.

Well, I have some good news for you! Here is a solution (pun intended!) which you will love: liquid mixes!

Don't be bound by the types of liquid I mention below. Go through your kitchen cupboards and try other combos. You may be surprised by the results!



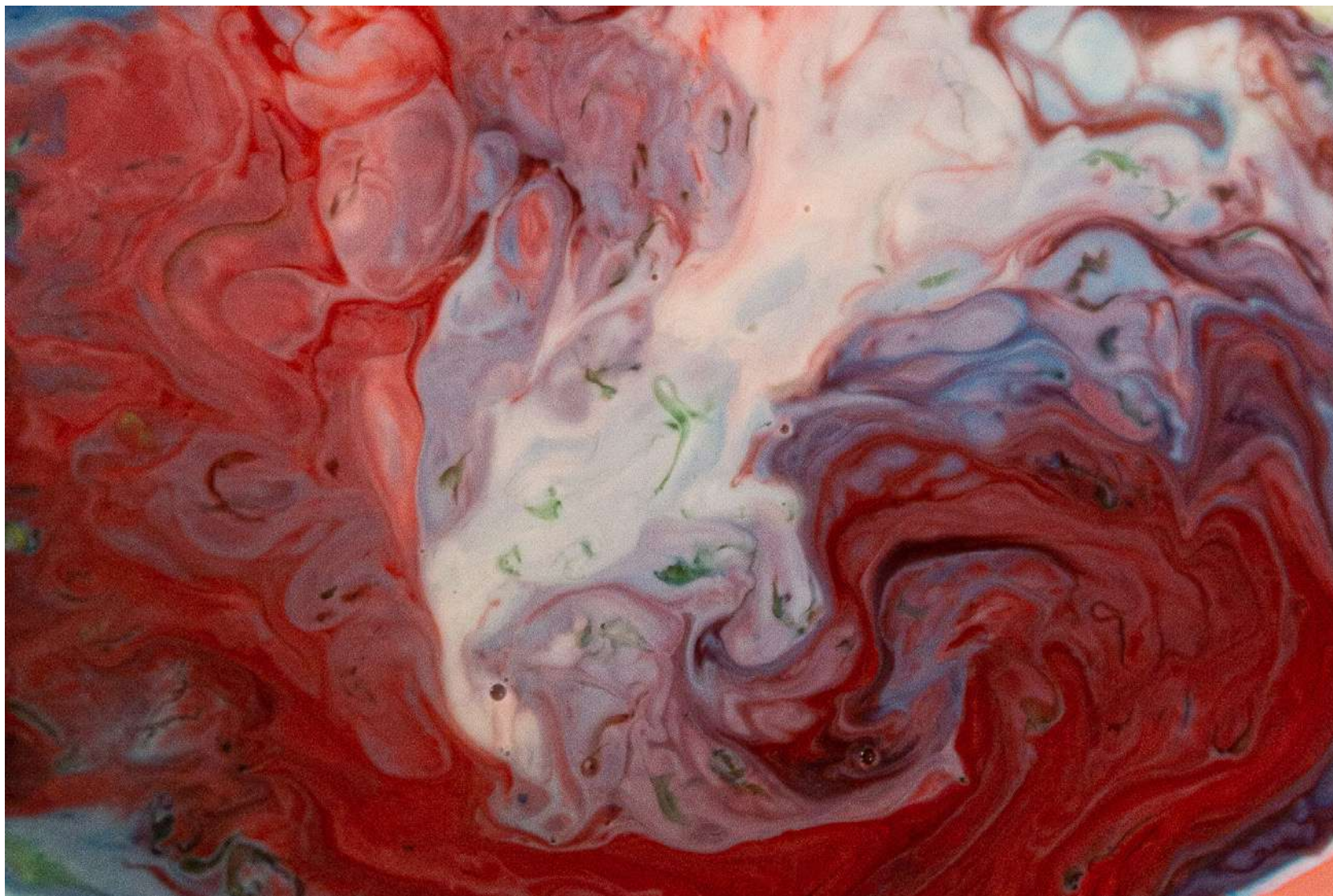
Photograph by Tobie Schalkwyk

WATER AND OIL

You will be amazed at what beautiful (if not weird!) patterns you can create by mixing oil and water. I have used the following for the image above:

- A glass-top coffee table to position a transparent glass bowl's lid on
- Colored paper below the lid
- A remote controlled speedlite with a diffuser below the tabletop
- A water and cooking oil mix

Method: Just swirl the water every now and again by blowing over the surface through a straw. You can draw your finger through it, but don't touch the bottom of the lid while you're doing it. The oil in the water will stick to your finger and create ugly drag-patterns on the bottom of the lid.




Photograph by Tobie Schalkwyk

MILK, DISH WASHING LIQUID, AND BAKING COLORANTS

This is something my granddaughter loves to play with. For some reason I have never really thought of photographing it – I have no idea why!

The setup is the same as for water and oil except that you do not need the colored paper. Also, this time you use your speedlight and diffuser on-camera.

Start by only dripping a bit of dish washing liquid in the milk and blowing some patterns with a straw. Then add a color. And another. And another. Stir the surface as explained above (using a straw) and take shots in between. Easy, hey?

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Photograph by Allen Taylor

CREATIVE ACTIVITY #3: PILLOW FIGHT

Do you have two kids in the house – and two old pillows you don't feel too attached to? Well, then shoot a pillow fight! The kids are guaranteed to enjoy it, and I'm sure so will you!

Remember to use a fast shutter speed and small aperture. A flash or speedlite will be a good idea if you're doing this indoors, not only to light everything up but also to freeze the feathers in mid-air.

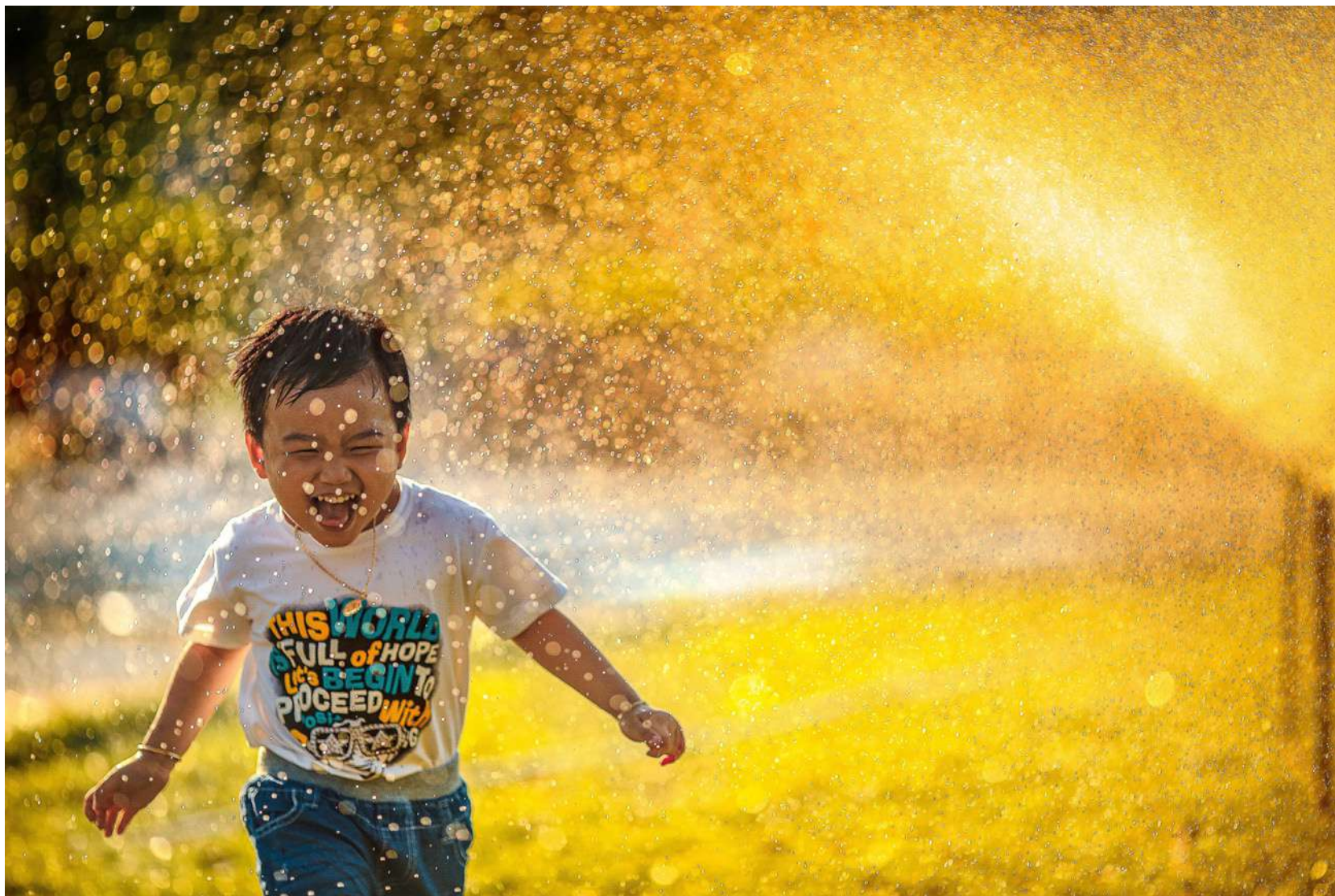


Photograph by Tobie Schalkwyk

CREATIVE ACTIVITY #4: USE ONLY ONE LENS

I was quite surprised by how well a zoom lens can photograph small critters – something that is traditionally assigned to macro lenses. An added advantage of a long-range lens is that you don't have to get too close to your subject!

Use your zoom lens and take photographs only at its longest range. Alternatively, do everything with, for example, your 50mm prime lens. This time you may have to get close to small critters, or crop in quite a bit in post-processing.



Photograph by Mi Pham

CREATIVE ACTIVITY #5: KIDS AND SPRINKLER

This is another one the kids will thank you for!

For the best effect, ensure that the sun is in front of you and a little to the side. A fast shutter speed is a must to capture the drops in mid-air and to freeze your running subjects!



Photograph by Tobie Schalkwyk

CREATIVE ACTIVITY #6: DON'T FORGET THE BIRDS!

Maybe you can't move out for a shoot. Thankfully, birds have wings so they can come to you.

I'm not too fond of using seed feeders because the birds tend to get lazy and after a while they don't go and find their own food anymore. Fruit feeders are different. They come for a snack and then move off to try and find something different.

I use a nail to attach an apple to my wooden fence. Once the birds know that you do that every day, they may visit you up to a few times per day. You may also feed meal worms and 'super worms' – most birds' ultimate favorite!

As an alternative, a bird bath is a bird magnet, and you are guaranteed to get awesome shots if you have enough patience.



Photograph by Tobie Schalkwyk




Photograph by Tobie Schalkwyk

CREATIVE ACTIVITY #7: REMEMBER THE ELEMENTS!

Maybe you're living in a bright city so astrophotography is not an option for you. Well, the sun and moon are different; they are huge and bright and city lights do not really affect them.

The best time of day, of course, is night (for the moon) and either dusk or dawn for both the sun and moon. Both are huge when they are positioned just above the horizon. At that time of the day, you can use the city smog to your advantage, as your dynamic range (bright against dark) is not too large to handle in-camera or during post-processing.

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Photograph by Tobie Schalkwyk

Early morning against Johannesburg's city smog.



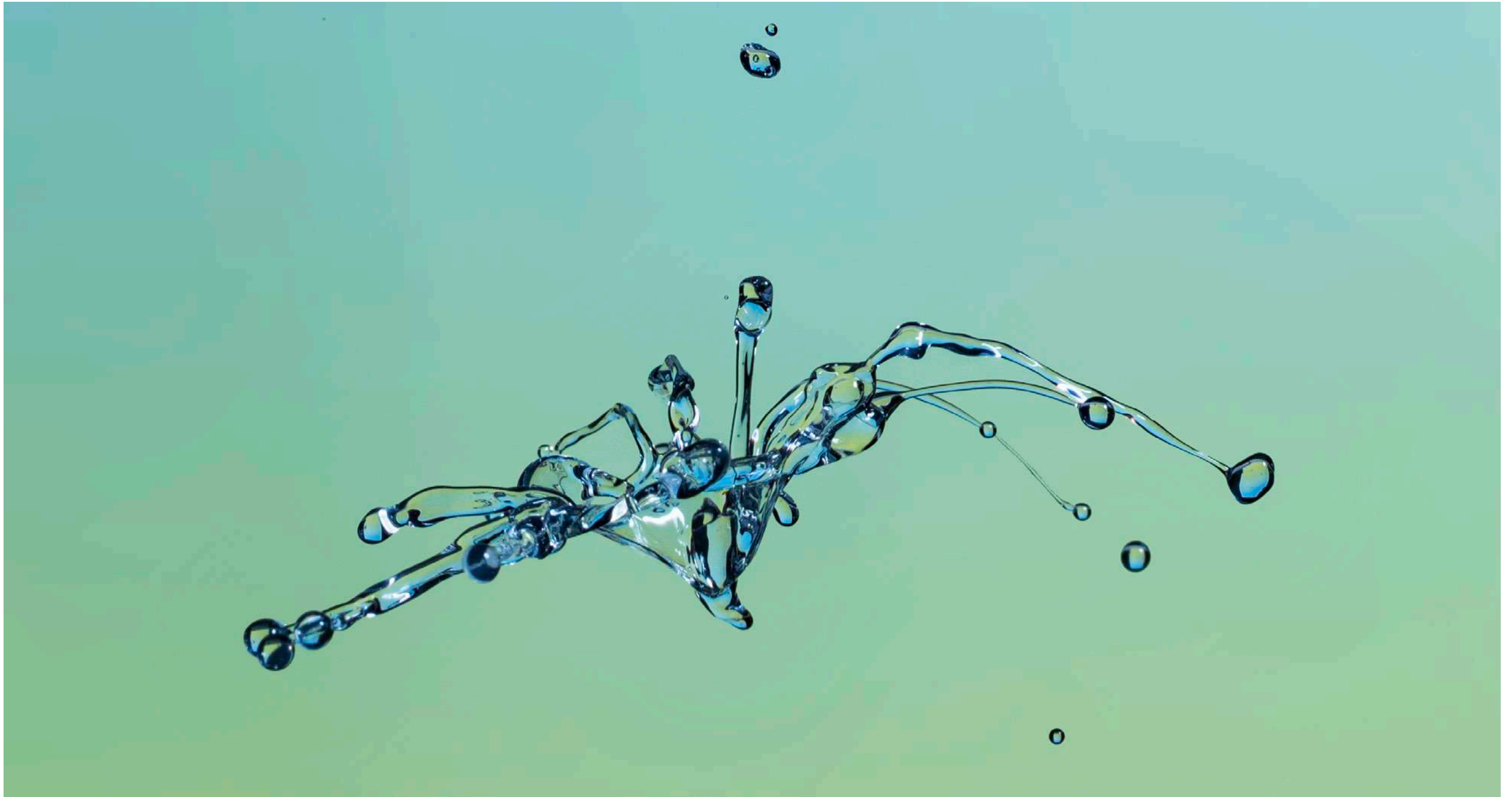
Photograph by Solen Feyissa

CONCLUSION

There is so much to photograph all around us! During these difficult times when we are not always able to move about freely, our immediate environment offers so much to photograph! All we have to do is LOOK and use a bit of imagination.

Look around the house for interesting subjects/objects, look around the yard, even in your garage! Who knows what ideas will pop up, simply because that's what you set your mind on?

Experiment, think out of the box, and *enjoy it!*



Photograph by David Chesterfield

Self-Check Quiz:

- 1) What are the basic components of a droplet photography setup?
- 2) How will you ensure that your water drops are in focus in droplet photography?
- 3) What is a 'clean' way to stir the surface of a liquid mixture?



Hey there!

Let's get real for a minute... Learning photography can be super challenging! But we're here to help you every step of the way! Here are 3 of our most useful (and *FREE!*) photography resources:



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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Tobie Schalkwyk is a retired Web Systems Developer hoping to soon make an income from photography alone. He has a passion for all genres of nature photography, specially bird photography but he also gets involved in other genres of photography like weddings, events and in-studio portraits.

Web sites: ctsphotography.co.za

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