

# How to Take Good Specimen ID Photos

When taking pictures of unknown plants and animals it's important to remember to take clear photos that focus on defining features experts look for. When blurry or out-of-focus photos are submitted for ID, they can lead to misidentification and delay a proper ID for time-sensitive issues.

Here's how you can help take better ID photos:

## Plants

When photographing plants for ID it's important to focus on not just the whole plant, but things like leaves, flowers, and other defining characteristics.

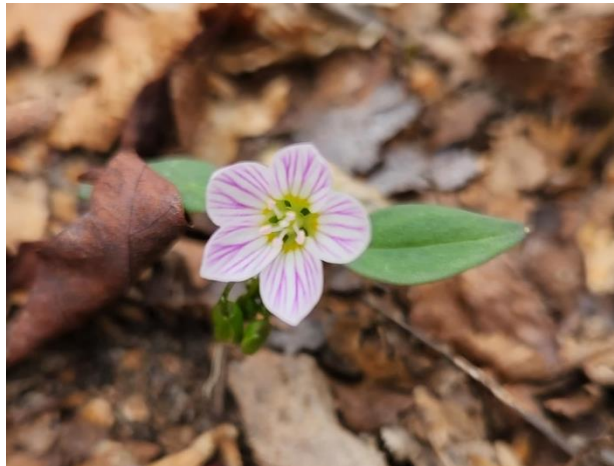
Take these photos of a native species, Spring Beauties (*Claytonia virginica*)



The plant is in focus and the flower, leaves, and stem can clearly be seen.

While flowers are ephemeral and are not found on many plants year-round, they are an important characteristic for ID when present.

This photo focuses on the flower and clearly shows the patterning and arrangement of the petals, stamen, and pistils.



In this last photo, the flower is out of focus, but the leaves, stems, and unopened buds are clear.

From this photo, experts can easily tell the leaf arrangement, leaf margin, overall shape, venation, and other characteristics important for ID.

# Animals

Unfortunately, unlike plants, animals can be tricky to keep still for photographs. When possible, contain animals in open boxes, clear containers, *etc.* to help take photos.

Taking multiple photographs and sorting through them to pick out the best ones for ID is a good strategy.

For animals, three main images should always be submitted: a photo of the top of the animal, from the side, and from below whenever possible. Additional photos highlighting things like wings, fins, and other distinctive features should also be included whenever possible.



When possible, use common items, such as the quarter above, to help indicate the size of the specimen.



Photos of the entire animal on matte surfaces are important. Use neutral backgrounds such as a towel, to take clear photos with no reflections or light spots.

When photographing animals, it's also important to take photos not only from the side but of the animal above and below.

Some features may be hidden or need to be manipulated to take good photos!  
Some fish have distinctive patterning on one or more fins.

When possible, and safe to do so, take additional photos highlighting these hidden features.



Some fish, insects, *etc.* are small and can be tricky to get clear, in-focus photos of. When taking photos of smaller organisms, it's generally better to take photos up close rather than zooming in.

Keep the animal in focus and fill the frame, images can be cropped after the picture is taken to zoom in on specific features.

There are many invasive species that resemble our native species. Taking good photos to ensure the correct ID is an important part of recognizing and responding appropriately to many invasive species.

Experts cannot be everywhere at once and good photos, of native and invasive species, submitted by the public are one of the best tools we have!

Thank you for helping us stop the spread of invasive species!

For more information on invasive species and what you can do to protect the Catskills visit [catskillinvasives.com](http://catskillinvasives.com)