Every 4th of July, family and friends gather to watch the local fireworks shows across America. We are attracted to the spectacular display—with its vivid colors, various patterns, and loud explosions. This year, make it a point to bring your digital point-and-shoot or SLR camera along. With the following tips, you’re sure to capture some impressive images of the show:

1) First of all, make sure that you are not downwind of the show. If you are, you will be taking pictures of smoke and not fireworks! You want to stay upwind of the show to get the clearest pictures.

2) If you have a tripod, you will want to pack that along with your chairs, drinks and snacks. Shooting on a tripod allows you capture longer exposures without moving the camera. Not everybody is willing to bring a tripod with them to the show, but the end results will be well worth the trouble.

3) Another good trick is to use the self-timer on your camera to take the picture. You want the movement of the light from the fireworks, but not the camera. Even the slightest movement from your hand depressing the shutter release on the camera can cause a picture to be blurry.
4) Get your camera set up properly. First, make sure that your flash is turned off. Then, if your camera has a setting that allows you to set your shutter speed, try experimenting with long exposures. Try a 3, 5, and 10 second exposure to see what you get. Typically, you will be better off using a long exposure for the individual fireworks and a shorter exposure for the grand finale (since there is so much light in the sky with all the bursts). Remember that the longer the exposure, the more of a “trail” you will see for each burst and the more likely you are to catch multiple bursts in one image.

If you want to get really fancy, once you’re home you can try combining different fireworks bursts into one image using your favorite photo editor, like Adobe Photoshop, Photoshop Elements or Corel Paint Shop Pro.
And finally, since you don’t know what firework is going off when, shoot a lot and see what you get. Memory cards can store lots of photos, which gives you lots of room to experiment. Like most good photographers, you need to shoot a lot to get one or two amazing pictures. Follow these tips and you’ll enjoy the show long after it’s over with great photos that will wow your friends and family.

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