

Fast Fix for Backlit Fall Photos

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by Jen White

Restore details and vibrance in a backlit fall photo with the Quick Selection tool and two image adjustments.

For this tutorial you will need:

- Adobe Photoshop or Photoshop Elements
- or any editing program that uses a quick selection tool and image adjustments
- A photo that has a serious backlighting problem

To follow along exactly, [download the photo I'm using](#).

Step One: Open and Duplicate a Photo

Open a photo (File > Open).

If you'd like to follow along with me, you can download (see link above) and use my photo for practice.

What kind of photo works best for this technique?

Use a photo that was taken when the sun was behind the subject. Because the sun is behind the subject, the subject will appear very dark producing what is known as a backlighting effect.

When working on a photo, it's always best to work on duplicate layers so that the original layer is not harmed in any way. To do that:

Press Ctrl J (Mac: Cmd J) to duplicate the Background layer.



Step Two: Select the Backlit Portion of the Photo

Get the Quick Selection tool.

Photoshop Elements Only:

- In the Tool Options, click on the Add to Selection icon and set the Brush Size to 50 px. Uncheck Sample All Layers, but check Auto-Enhance.
- Click on Brush Settings.
- In the dialog box set the Hardness to 50%, the Spacing to 25%, the Roundness to 100%, the Size to Off, and the Angle to 0.
- Click on Brush Settings again to close the dialog box.

Adobe Photoshop Only:

- In the Tool Options, click on the Add to Selection icon.
- Click on the down arrow to open the Brush Settings.
- In the dialog box set the Size to 50 px, the Hardness to 50%, the Spacing to 25%, the Angle to 0°, and the Roundness to 100%.
- Click on down arrow again to close the dialog box.

Both Programs:

On the Image, click and drag a selection around the part of the image that is backlit.

The very fact that the image is backlit should make it easy to select the dark areas of the photo that need lightened up.



- To add to the selection, click and drag again.
- To subtract from the selection, hold down the Alt key (Mac: Opt key) and click and drag.

The selection does not have to be perfect.



Step Three: Correct the Backlighting

In the Layers panel, click on the Add Layer Mask icon.

Note: Doing this should not have changed what you see on your screen.

You should now have a layer mask attached to the duplicate layer. In the mask, the part you had selected should be white. The rest of the mask should be black. The part that is white will be the only part of the layer that is effected by the adjustment we are about to make.

- In the Layers panel, double click on the thumbnail of the duplicate layer to activate it again.
- In the Menu Bar, choose Enhance > Adjust Lighting > Shadows/Highlights. (PS: Choose Image > Adjustments > Shadows/Highlights.)
- In the dialog box, adjust the Lighten Shadows slider to bring back details. (PS: Adjust the Shadows slider.) I have set my slider to 35%.
- Click OK.

Warning! Overdoing the Lighten adjustment will cause your photo to look unnatural.



Step Four: Add Vibrance to the Background

- In the Layers panel, click on the Background layer to activate it.
- Press Ctrl J (Mac: Cmd J) to duplicate the Background layer.

Photoshop Elements Only:

- In the Menu Bar, choose Enhance > Adjust Color > Hue/Saturation.
- In the dialog box, move the Saturation slider to the right to saturate the fall colors. I moved mine to 40.
- Click OK.

Warning! Overdoing the Saturation adjustment will cause your photo to look unnatural.

Adobe Photoshop Only:

- In the Menu Bar, choose Image > Adjustment > Vibrance.

- In the dialog box, move the Vibrance slider to the right to saturate the fall colors. I moved mine all the way to 100%.
- Click OK.



My photo still needs some TLC, but at least I now have a image that matches the memory I was wanting to preserve.

Here's the before and after:



Step Five: Save the New Image

Save the new image (File > Save As) as a high quality JPEG file with a unique name. Close the working copy without saving.

Here the scrapbook page I made with my photo:



Page: Harvest the Cuteness by Jen White

Photos: Jen White

Kits: Blank Canvas by Susie Roberts, Curated Studio Mix No14 by Katie Pertiet

Fonts: DJB ANNALISE 2011, Broadwell