



In the Belly of the Whale, © Laura Burlton, 2006. Made at Story Land with a Holga using the bulb setting, on Agfa RSX II transparency film, cross-processed in C-41 chemistry.

chapter four

Film Options

FEEDING YOUR PLASTIC CAMERA

Film Choice: What Flavor of Film?

The medium-format versions of Holgas and Dianas use 120 film, which comes wrapped around plastic reels about 2¼" tall and has a paper backing along the whole length of the film, with extra paper at each end. Roll film comes wrapped in foil, leading my non-photographer friends to think I always have candy in my pockets, which may also be the case. You can use black-and-white (B&W), color negative, or transparency film in low-tech cameras, but the limitations of each may affect your film choice.

Be careful not to confuse 120 film with 220 film, which looks the same, but has twice the length of film, with paper only at the ends. It is more difficult to use with the Holga or the Diana because it doesn't have the numbers on the paper backing to help orient you while advancing the film. However, 220 film offers the advantage of twice the number of images per roll as 120 film does. When using 220 film, follow the same technique and precautions as shooting with 35 mm film, which are covered in Chapter 8. Some photographers actually court light leaks when shooting 220 film by leaving the red window uncovered.

For most plastic camera shooting, I recommend 400 speed negative film, color or black-and-white. Because negative film provides lots of latitude and can capture a wide range of tones, you can compensate for the camera's lack of controls later on, tweaking your images in the printing or scanning process. Negatives that are over- or underexposed can often still create good final images. See Chapter 9 for more on film handling and processing.



A selection of 120 film.

When considering which film speed to use, remember that most plastic cameras have only one to three apertures and shutter speeds, which limits your ability to adjust the camera's settings to the lighting circumstances. Holgas have a single-setting spring shutter, $\sim 1/100$ second, and one or two apertures, $\sim f/11$. The bulb setting some plastic cameras sport, which allows for long exposures, is not easily controllable or repeatable. Using it usually results in too long an exposure for daylight shots, but for very low-light situations, it can be quite useful. Always choose a fast enough film so that you can get the exposure needed to make good images—ISO 400 is a great general shooting speed. You can also use faster films; speeds of up to ISO 3200 are available. By increasing the processing times with some of these, you can get the equivalent of film speeds that go through the roof, although with this come changes in other areas, such as grain.

With transparency film, the film itself is the final product, so correct exposure is critical. Transparency film, as well as slower speed negative films, can be used in situations where you can

adjust your light input. This is possible when using the bulb setting on your Holga or Diana or on- or off-camera flash or studio strobes. Handheld light meters can be helpful in determining the level of available light. There will be more on these options later in Chapters 6 and 7.

Many people are surprised that Holgas and Dianas shoot color. In fact, they make wonderful color images, and the final prints you produce can be gorgeous if you continue the chain of control by doing your own color printing, whether darkroom or digital. There are a few different types of color film available that can create a range of moods and feelings in your images. Portrait films reproduce slightly muted colors and good skin tones. Super-saturated films make colors pop to create heightened effects and even surreal images. Results can be even more personalized using techniques such as cross-processing and hand-coloring. Experiment with your preferences and subject matter to get results you love. Even with the limitations of Holgas, Dianas, and other plastic cameras, don't be afraid of shooting when the light isn't perfect or when you don't have the right type of film in the camera. Poor negatives may be a challenge, but a lost moment is lost forever.

FILM TYPES

Black-and-White Film

Traditional B&W films can be processed at home in any sink or developed by a lab. Not all B&W films are available in 120 size, but there is still quite a variety. Kodak Tri-X Pan 400 is an ideal choice for plastic cameras, but also consider Kodak Tmax 400, Fujifilm's Neopan, Ilford's HP5, Delta 400, and Freestyle's new Holga film, along with some of the less well-known 400 speed choices, including Arista, Foma, and Rollei. These can all be pushed to achieve more speed, but for the greatest light sensitivity, use the one-of-a-kind, Ilford Delta Pro 3200, the only B&W film faster than 400 that comes in 120 size. It can be rated from 400 to 6400 and even higher with special developers. For slower B&W films, there are many choices. Freestyle Photographic and B&H Photo carry wide selections of hard-to-find films and offer some new and off-beat options. Check the Resources section at the end for information on suppliers and more.



Wax Orchard Tree, © Michelle Bates, 2005. Holga image taken with Ilford Delta 3200 film on a very foggy morning.

Infrared Film

For those wanting to combine a plastic camera's signature style with an alternative look in film, there are three types of available 120 film that give infrared (IR) effects: Efke IR820 (formerly Macophot IR820c 820nm) for true infrared shooting and Ilford SFX and Rollei Infrared for near-IR. See Chapter 7 for more information on these films and how to use them.



Ethereal 2-14, © Ryan Synovec, 2008. A classic infrared image, highlighting IR film's effects on trees and water. A Holga camera on a tripod, using Efke IR820 film and a Hoya R72 filter to block visible light.

Black-and-White C-41 Film

Ilford XP2 and Kodak BW400CN are specialty films that produce monochromatic negatives, but are processed in color negative (or C-41) chemistry. The magic of these films is that you get beautiful black-and-white negatives, but they can be taken in for processing to any color lab that can do 120 film. If you don't process your own film, don't have access to a professional lab that runs black-and-white, and don't want to send precious images in the mail, these films are a great option. Labs processing B&W film are less and less common these days, so if you've kept your darkroom equipment stored away, you may want to hold onto it or even set it up again.

Both Kodak and Ilford black-and-white C-41 films are ISO 400 and, like the same speed color films, have wide latitude and capture a generous range of tones. Negatives from either film can be used to make prints in a color lab or a home black-and-white darkroom. According to the companies' specifications, the Kodak BW400CN is optimized for printing on color paper, while Ilford XP2 is meant for printing on standard black-and-white paper. Even so, experimentation can be a gateway to discovery that you may want to boldly explore. These wonderful films richly enhance your shooting options and processing possibilities.

Color Negative Film

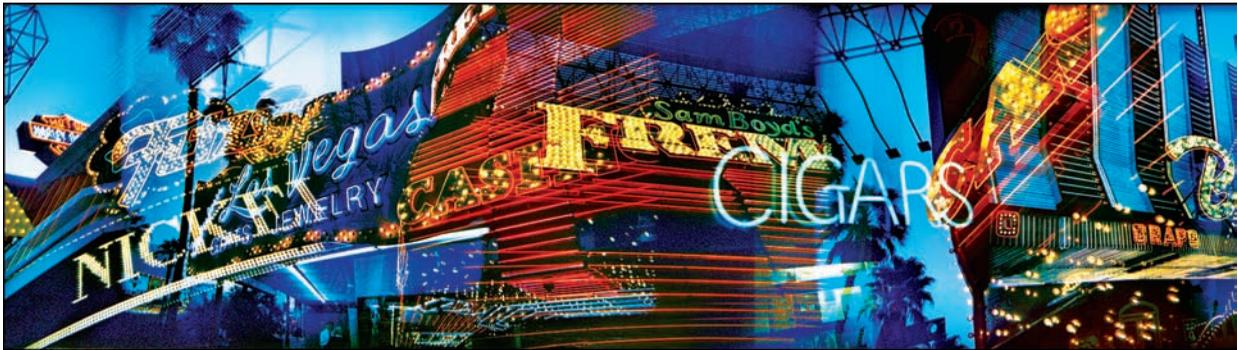
As film sales plummet with the rise in the use of digital cameras, the selection of color 120 films is dwindling. Kodak's selection is the widest, while Fujifilm has at least one option, Fujifilm Pro 400H. Kodak's options are Portra 160NC, 160VC, 400NC, 400VC, and 800—the only high-speed 120 color film still being made. NC, which stands for natural color, produces a tonal range good for portraiture. The VC, or vivid color, versions make images with higher contrast and color saturation. Rollei's offering, Digibase CN200 Pro, has a clear base that makes for easier negative scanning. Experiment to see which color balance and intensity suit your shooting style. As with all film, brands and versions are coming and going quickly, so if you find one you cherish, you may want to stock up.



Silver Bay Boathouse, from *The Adirondacks*, © Mary Ann Lynch, 2001. A Diana camera handheld, extended bulb exposure on Fujicolor NPH 400 pro color negative film. The muted tonalities and soft focus created by the long exposure imbue the scene with a timeless quality.

Transparency Film

Transparency film, also called slide film, is tricky to use in a camera that has very little in the way of exposure control. But it is suitable to a Holga if you're up for a challenge. These films offer bright, saturated colors, and the ease of viewing your images without an intermediate printing step. Chapter 7 offers several tips to increase control over your exposures, vital for getting well-exposed transparencies. Kodak and Fujifilm offer several choices from ISO 50 to 400, while Rollei makes Digibase CR200 Pro.



Lights of Fremont, Golden Nugget, © Susan Bowen, 2007, A multi-image Holga panorama shot on Kodak Portra 800 color-negative film, pushed two stops.

Cross-Processing

Another way to add unpredictability and a special look to your toy camera experience is to cross-process color film. To do this, transparency film, normally developed in E-6 processing, instead is run through color negative C-41 chemistry, yielding a variety of fascinating color results. Similarly, color negative film that is cross-processed goes through the E-6 processing usually associated with transparency film. Few labs are willing to cross-process, so ask around or check online forums to find a lab near you or use a mail-order lab.

35 mm Film

Even though the Holga 120N and Diana+ are made to use 120 film, you can also load up either one with 35 mm film, as detailed in Chapter 8. With this smaller film, the images are wide panoramic shots that bleed right out to the edge of the film, including the sprocket holes in the image. There are many classic and new plastic 35 mm cameras that allow you to take advantage of the far greater selection of 35 mm films still available.



Instant Films

Polaroid's instant film cameras have been popular since their inception. With the advent of digital photography, however, a different way of achieving instant gratification has overtaken the prominence of this format. As a result, Polaroid ceased producing film in 2009. Fortunately for those who still appreciate the thrill of making instant prints, Fujifilm still produces several versions. Instant film backs are currently made for the Holga, which can use these Fujifilm peel-apart films: FP-100C (100 ISO color), FP-100B (100 ISO black-and-white), and FP-3000B (3000 ISO black-and-white). The very first generation of Holgaroid backs used Polaroid's 80 series films, which are gone, along with the 660 series



A Holga with a Polaroid instant film back may look like a cloning attempt gone wrong, but don't be misled—it's your passport to instant satisfaction. A diopter lens and (very approximate) external viewfinder are included.

films that the later versions accepted. In 2009, The Impossible Project was created to resurrect some formats of Polaroid film, but it is not working on peel-apart versions that would work with any of the Holga backs. The Lomographic Society makes instant backs for its Diana+ and LC-A+; both use the ISO 800 Fujifilm Instax Mini film. See details on using instant backs in Chapter 7.

Expired Film

As film ages, its characteristics change. Usually photographers try to avoid using degraded film, but in our plastic realm, where the cameras themselves are agents of unpredictability, expired film can add another appealing element of chance to image making. And sometimes, as with Polaroid, expired film is all we have left to shoot with.



Round Barn, Ojo Caliente, New Mexico, © Michelle Bates, 2003. A Holga Polaroid image made with a first-generation Hoglaroid back on 80 series square film.