

## Photoshop Plugins

### Extend your photo editing capabilities with these little gems.

In computing, a **plugin** (or **plug-in**) is a computer program that interacts with a host application. The purpose of the plugin is to provide specialized functionality to the host program. Think of a Kitchen-Aid Mixer. You can purchase several different “add-ons” or attachments for the basic mixer in order to provide special capabilities for preparing your recipes. Some examples include different kinds of beaters, a pasta maker, a dough hook and more. *Photoshop* plugins can add a whole host of photo editing features, such as adding frames and edges, color correcting, masking, special effects, and a whole lot more.

Generally, the *Photoshop* plugins are commercially developed and sold through normal software distribution channels. A few companies, like **Nik Software** and **OnOne Software**, specialize in plugin development. These tend to be fairly expensive. However, free versions are available for trial periods. Also, some plugins are intended for the professional versions of *Photoshop* (eg; *Photoshop CS4*), others may work with *Photoshop Elements* and *Lightroom* as well. Be sure to check the specifications. Also, many are version-specific, so check that, too!

There are also independent developers who offer their plugins for free or for a nominal charge.

The thing about plugins is that, yes, you can manually do just about anything that these plugins can do, but many of the techniques are extremely complex and time consuming. Plugins just make it easier, and give you a look into the myriad of possibilities with image editing.

Plugin installation is generally pretty straightforward, as it involves running an installer. Others may require manual installation, so be sure to read the installation instructions.

### A FEW PLUGINS TO CONSIDER

The two big *Photoshop* Plugin developers are **Nik Software** ([www.NikSoftware.com](http://www.NikSoftware.com)) and **OnOne Software** ([www.OnOneSoftware.com](http://www.OnOneSoftware.com)).

My favorite *Nik* plugins are: **Color Efex Pro** and **Silver Efex Pro**. With *Color Efex Pro*, I have 52 photographic filters with over 250 effects for my professional quality images. I've been using this for several years. Sometimes, you can get a limited edition of *Color Efex* bundled with products, such as the *Wacom Bamboo* tablet. **Silver Efex Pro** provides me with complete power and control to create stunning black and white images all in one convenient tool.

From *OnOne Software*, I love **PhotoFrame** for adding edges to my images for that finishing touch, and **FocalPoint** for applying depth-of-field effects. Check their downloads page as they offer trials and *free* versions... be sure to check the specifications.

For you HDR and tonemapping fans ... check out **Topaz Adjust** by *Topaz Labs* ([www.TopazLabs.com](http://www.TopazLabs.com)). Also check out their several other excellent low cost plugins.

I've also used some inexpensive plugins from *Flaming Pear* ([www.FlamingPear.com](http://www.FlamingPear.com)): **Melancholytron**, **Mr. Contrast**, and **Zombie**.

GOOGLE SEARCH "PHOTOSHOP PLUGINS" TO FIND OTHERS!