

AN INTRODUCTION TO LEVELS AND CURVES

Levels and the Curves are used for one of the single most important editing tasks: image tone control. Whenever you have a photograph that has less than perfect contrast, i.e. the contrast is either too low or, conversely, too high, you need to use some form of tone control. Both the Levels and the Curves allow you to alter the black and white end points of the tonal range in the image. Adjusting the end points allows you to change the global or overall contrast of a photograph; the method and affect is the same whichever of the two commands you choose to use.

Both commands also allow you to change the appearance of the intermediate, or grey, tones in-between the black and white end points. However, the important difference between the two commands is that a Levels adjustment proportionally changes all of the tones in the tonal range; whereas the Curves allow you to choose which portion of the tone scale you wish to adjust. The Levels is a linear adjustment but the Curves are a geometric adjustment (in fact, this difference is in the names levels and linear, curves and geometric). This is a massive difference and using Curves rather than Levels will elevate your editing skill to a professional level.

Use Levels when:

- You only want to adjust the black or white end points to adjust global contrast
- You want to lighten or darken the entire tonal range. This is normal to adjust exposure errors.
- You want to maintain the visual relationship of the values of the intermediate tones.

Use Curves when:

- You want to subtly adjust the visual relationship of the tone values. For example lighten the lights and darken the shadows. This usually requires an 'S' shaped curve adjustment.
- You want to adjust only the light tones or only the dark tones.
- You want to adjust the tones in only a small section of the overall tonal range.
- You want complete control of your tonal editing.

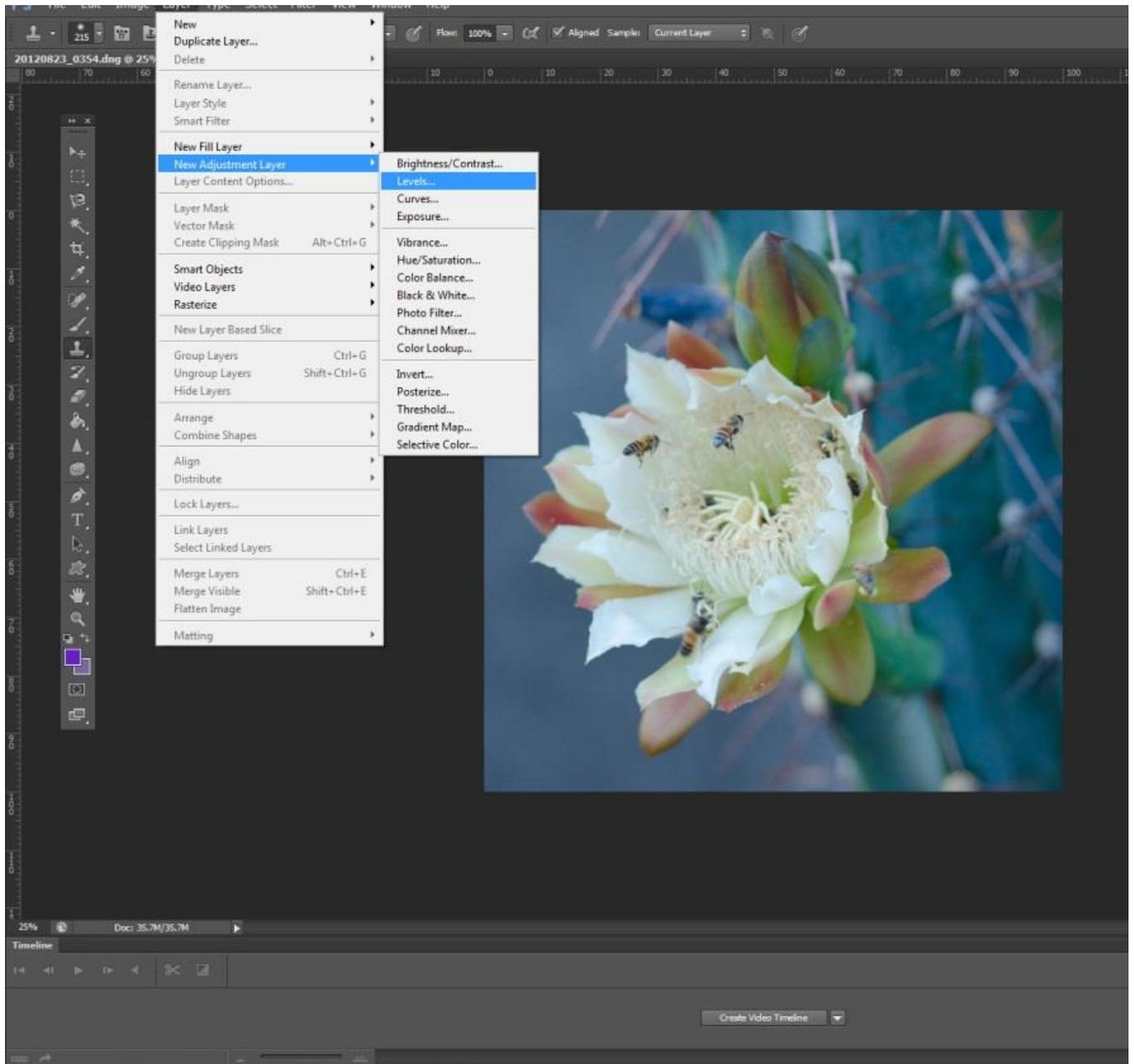
Article Source: <http://EzineArticles.com/4049511>

This is just an introduction, so you can get started in making your images better, you can make more advanced adjustments with Levels and Curves too.

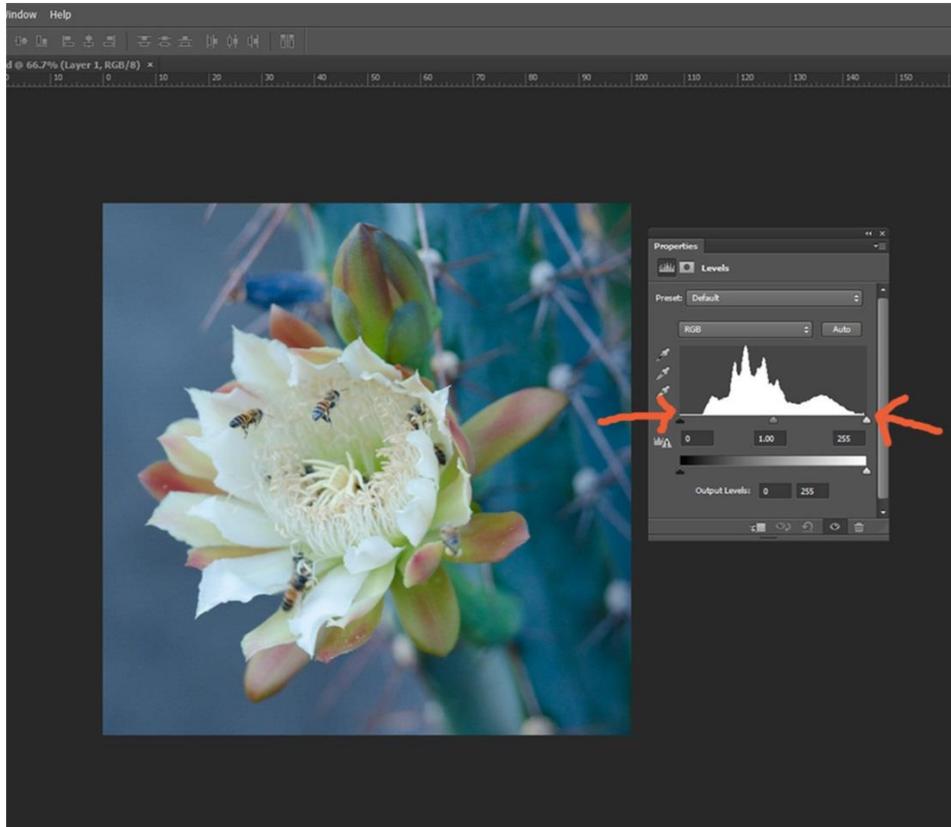
Levels and Curves in Photoshop

Levels

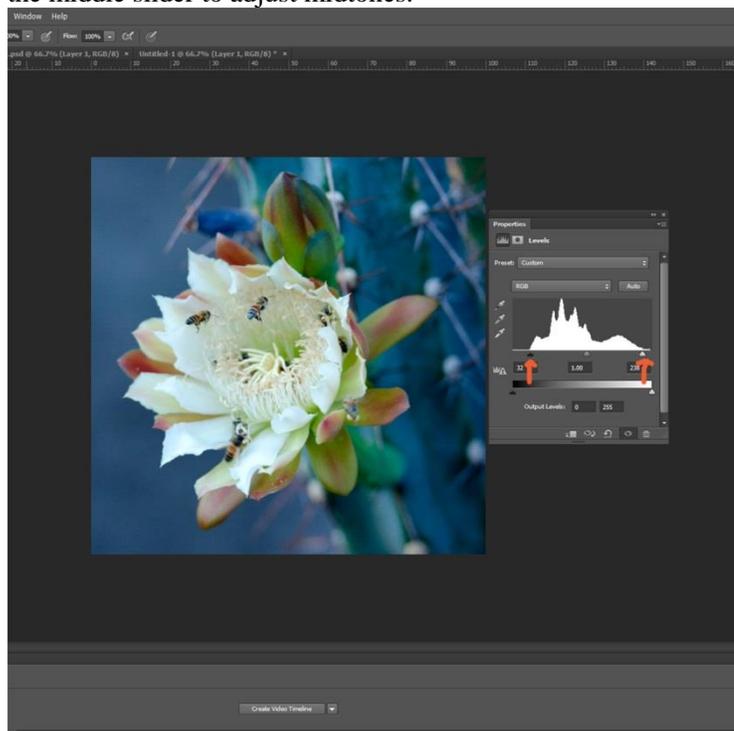
1. Open your image in Photoshop
2. Either select Image-Adjustments-Levels **OR** for non-destructive editing, select a new adjustment layer and select levels.



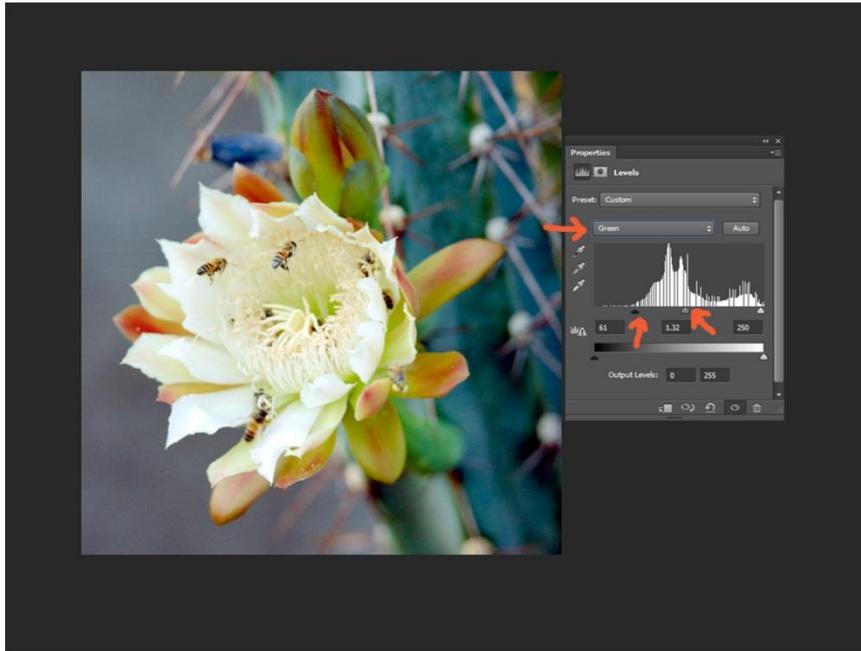
3. Look at the histogram that comes up. In this example, the histogram does not go all the way to both ends. To improve the image, we need to move the black and white arrow sliders towards the middle to the edge of the histogram.



4. Here we moved the sliders inward. The left slider was moved more than the right. We can also move the middle slider to adjust midtones.

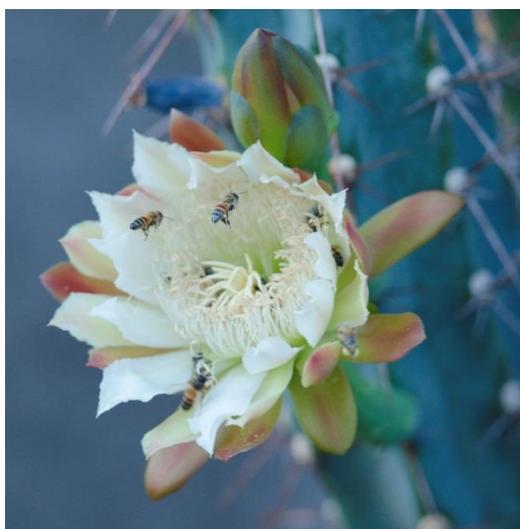


5. You can also adjust color in levels. Instead of adjusting the RGB Levels, here we adjusted the green channel. Notice we moved the black slider to the right, and moved the midtone slider to the left a bit.



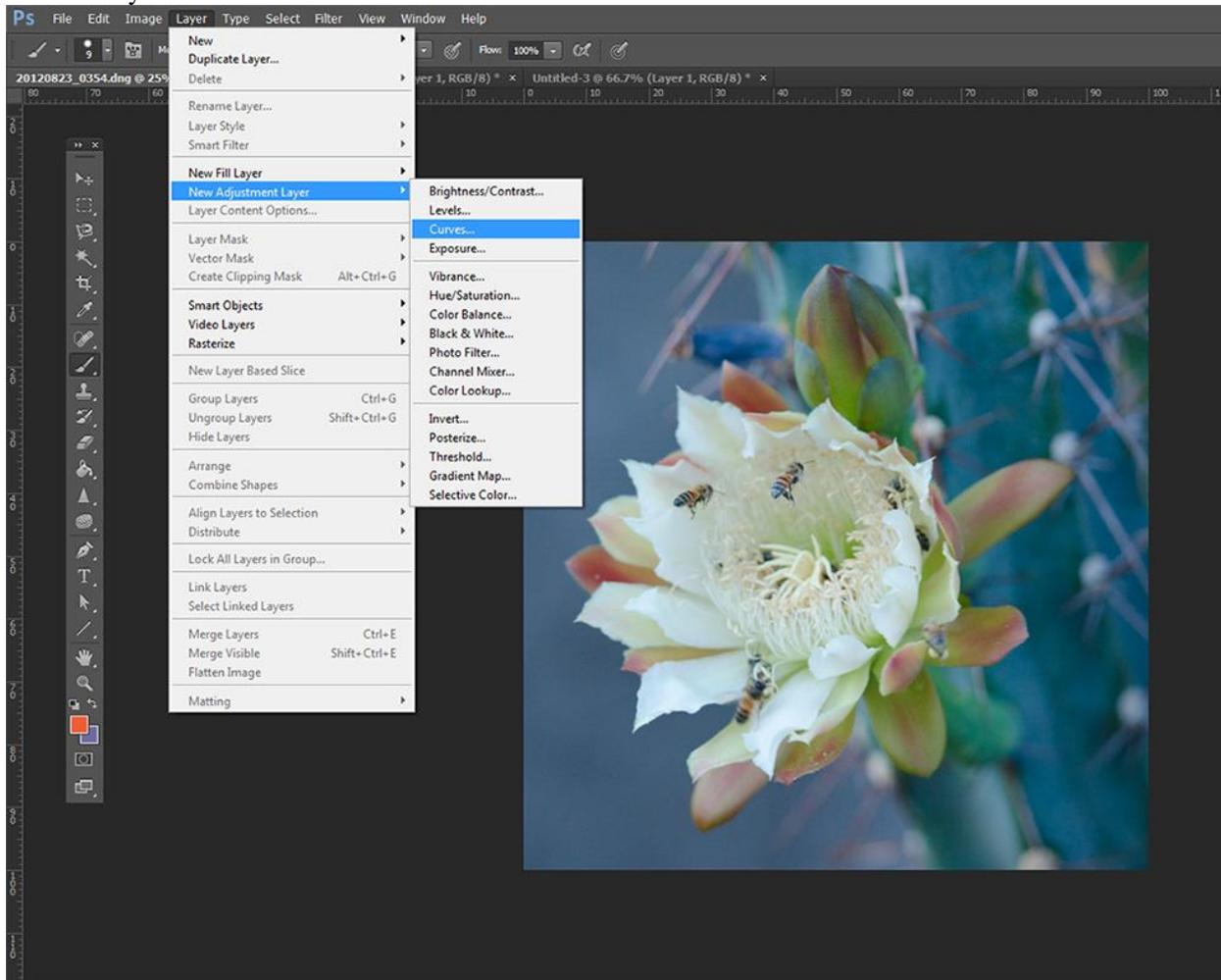
Before

After

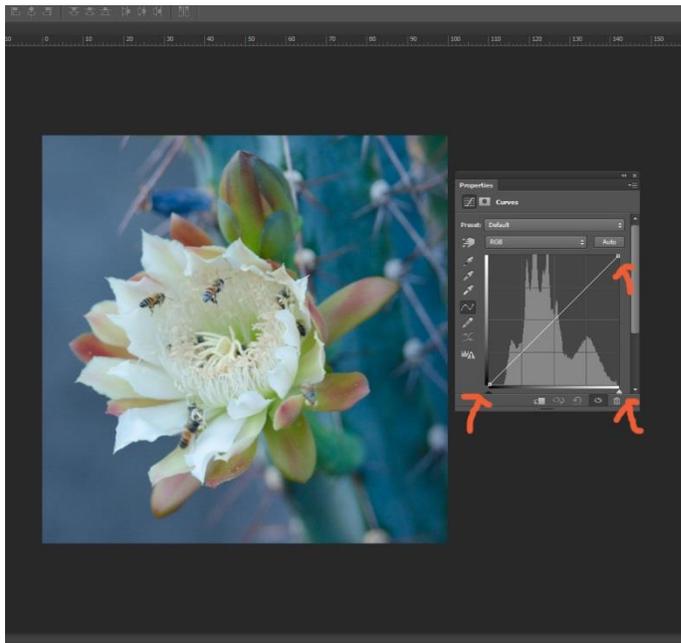


Curves

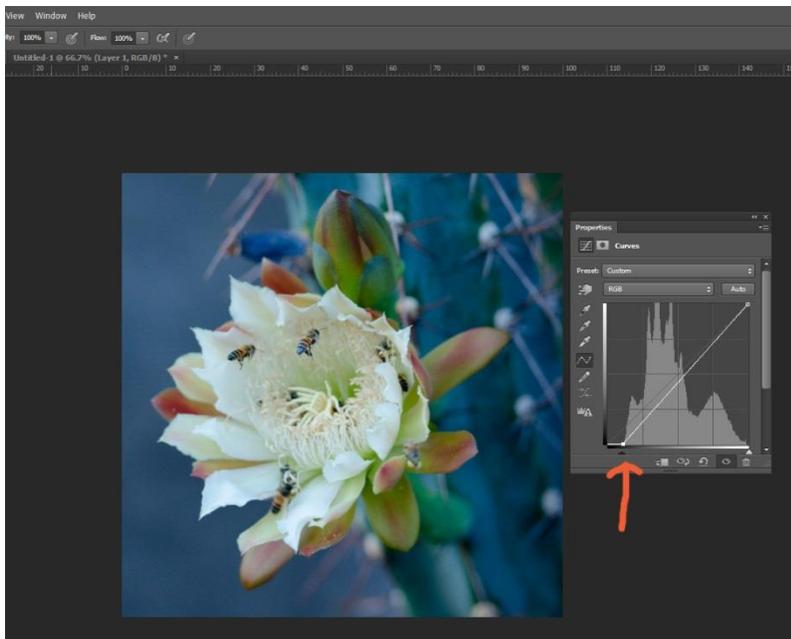
1. Open Your Image in Photoshop
2. Select Image-Adjustments-Curves **OR** for non-destructive editing, select Layer-New Adjustment Layer-Curves



3. Look at the graph that came up. Again there is a histogram. Notice the straight diagonal line thru the center. In this image, the histogram does not go all the way to the left side.

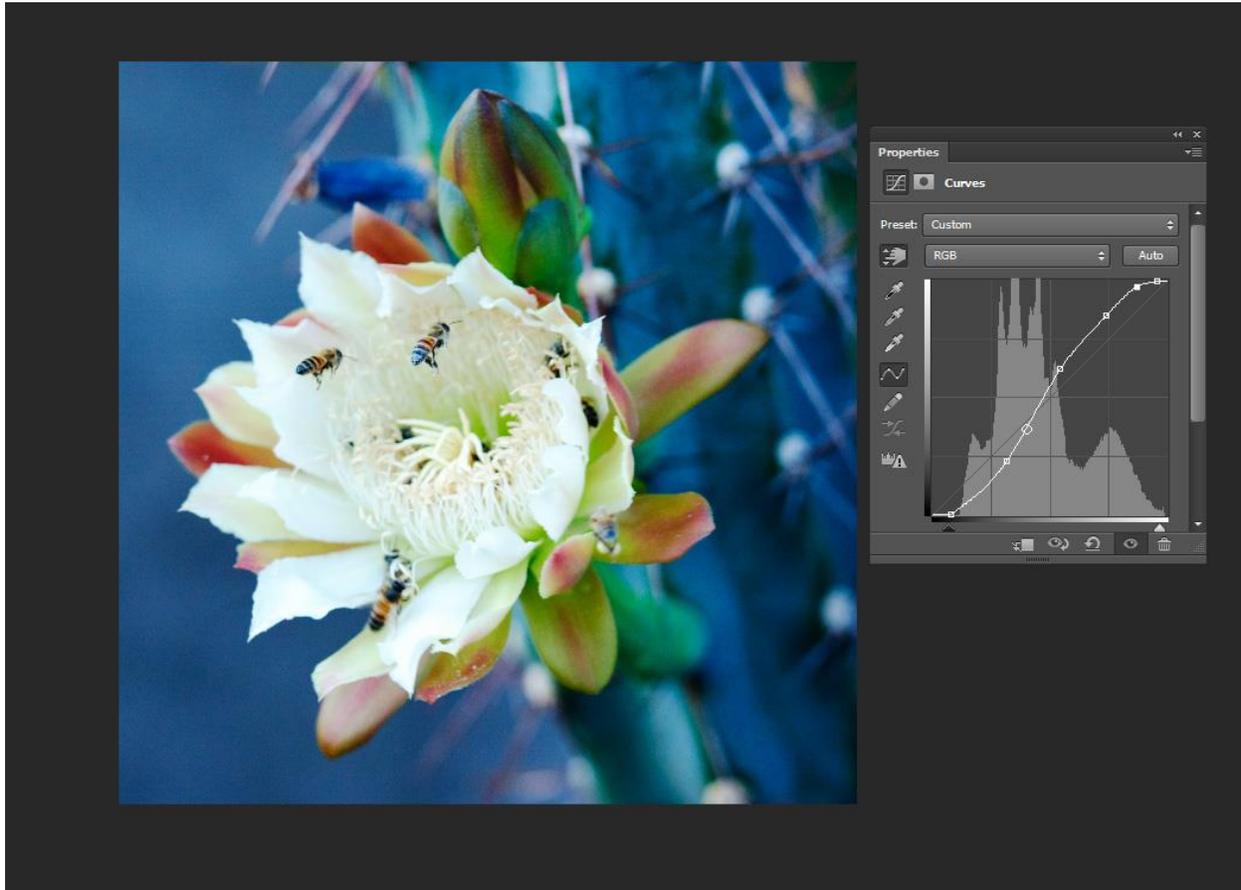


4. Start by moving the slider to the edge of the histogram.



5. Now you can adjust the curve. For most pictures, a gentle S curve will work.

- Pick several points along the diagonal line and curve them up or down. On the right side, with the highlights, you may want to curve up. On the left side, pull down and make adjustments for midtones.



Before

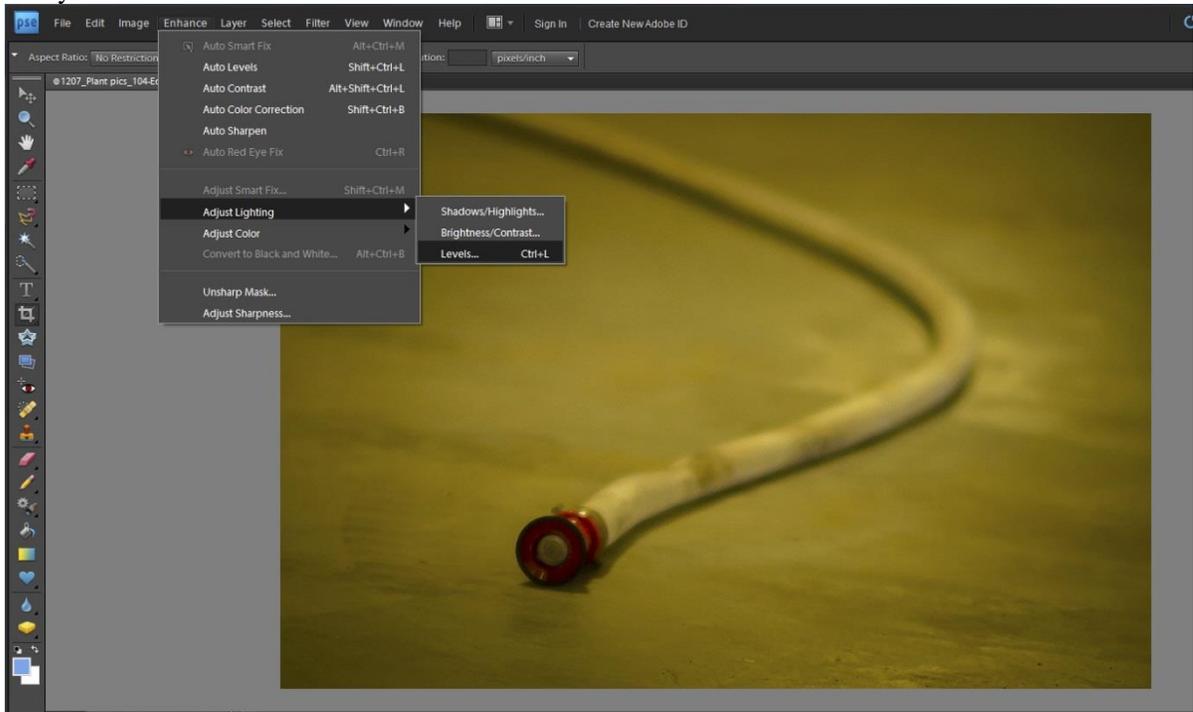
After



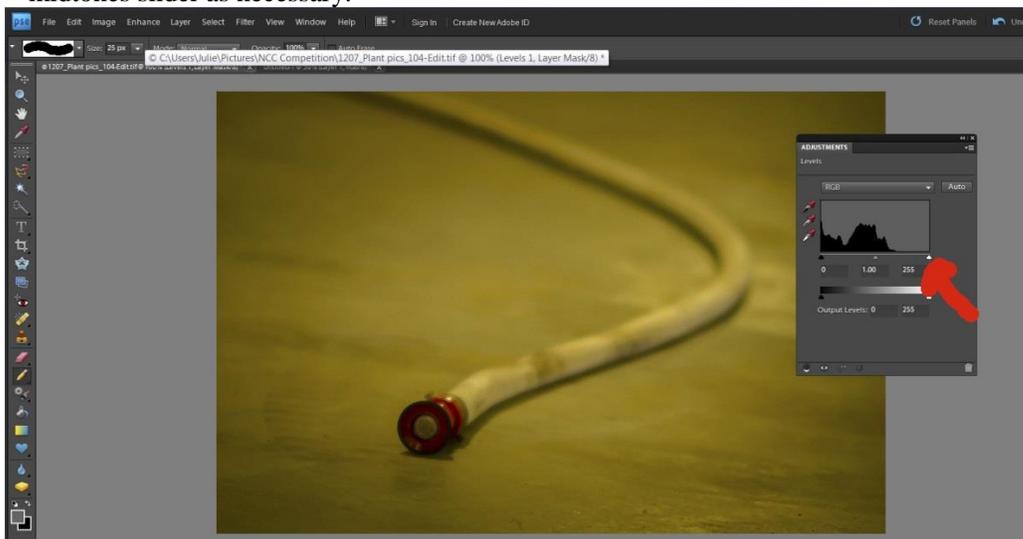
Levels and Curves in Photoshop Elements

Levels

1. Open the image you wish to edit.
2. Select Enhance-Adjust Lighting-Levels OR non-destructive edits by selecting Layer-New Adjustment Layer-Levels



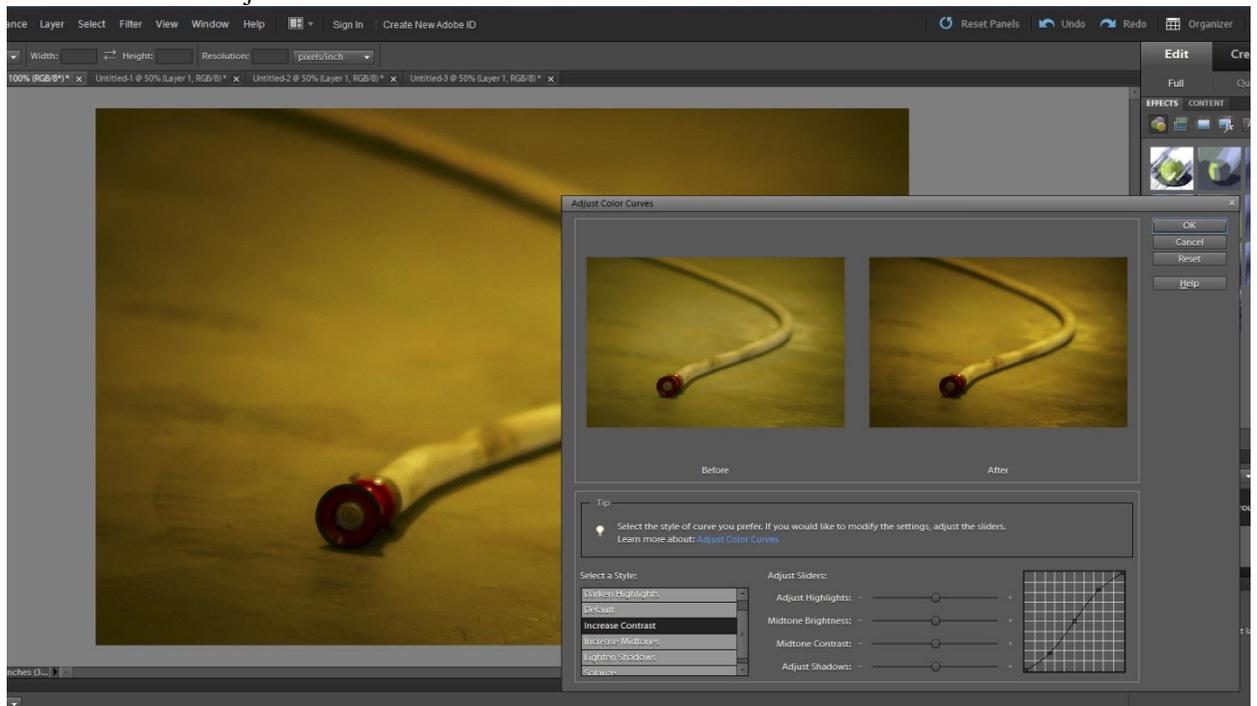
3. Look at the histogram. Move the black slider, if necessary, towards the middle to the edge of the histogram. Move the white slider towards the middle to the right edge of the histogram. Adjust the midtones slider as necessary.



4. You can also do color correction by adjusting the individual color channels.

Curves

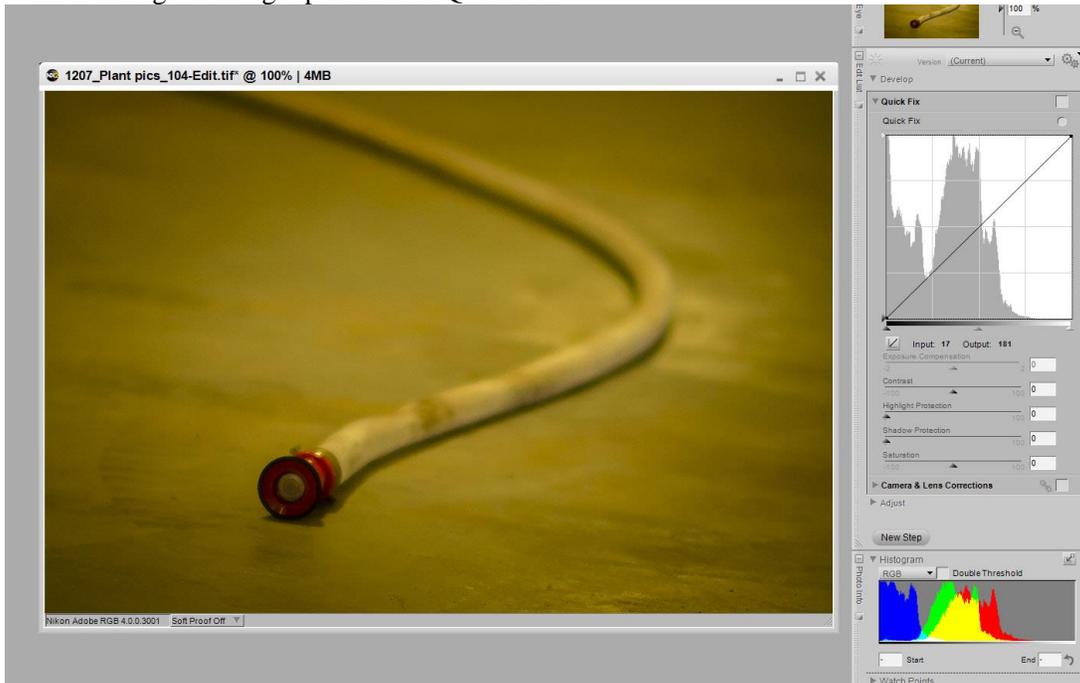
1. Open Image.
2. Create a duplicate layer.
3. Select Enhance-Adjust Color –Color Curves



4. Select a style and then make further adjustments by moving the sliders.

Levels in Capture NX 2

1. Open picture.
2. Go to histogram in right panel under Quick Fix.



3. Adjust the black and white sliders to the edges of the histogram.
4. Adjust the points in the diagonal line to form a curve.



5. Color corrections can be made by selecting Adjust-Light-Levels and Curves and edit the individual color channels in Levels and Curves histogram in right panel.

Levels and Curves in Lightroom

1. Select Image you wish to edit.
2. Select Develop mode.
3. Go to Tune Curve in the right panel.

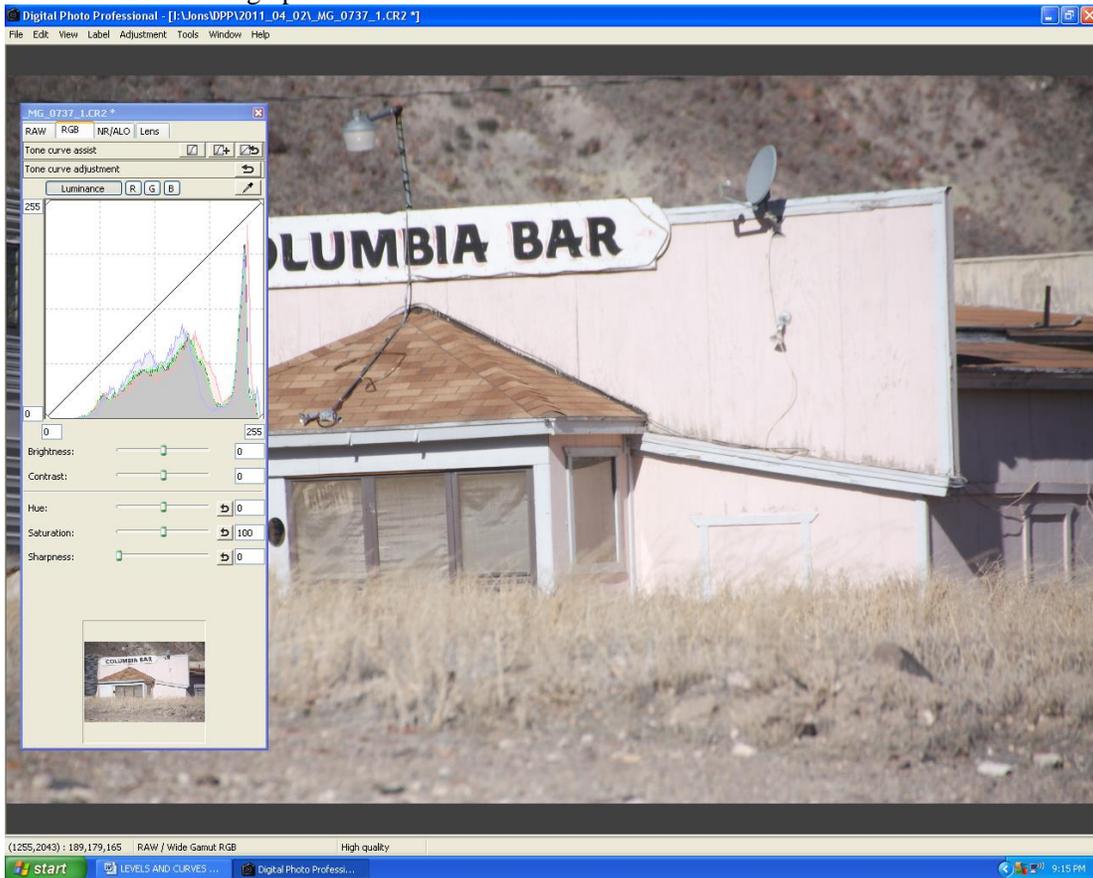


4. Select the double arrows next to Linear to select linear, medium or strong contrast.
5. Move sliders or adjust curve on the tone curve for refined adjustments.



Levels and Curves in DPP

1. Open Image you wish to edit.
2. Hit CTRL T to bring up edit window.



3. Select RGB to edit Tone Curve
4. You can hit Tone Curve Assist buttons as a starting point.
5. Adjust the sliders or individual points on the curve. You can also adjust the sliders to touch the edge of the histogram as needed.

