

West Haddon Photo Club

How to Create a Fully Black (or White) Background

Introduction

Creating a dense black background, even when starting with something like a plain black sheet of fabric or paper, can prove troublesome as it nearly always shows up as a shade of dark grey or dark blue. But this method of post processing using Photoshop can help you deal with that.

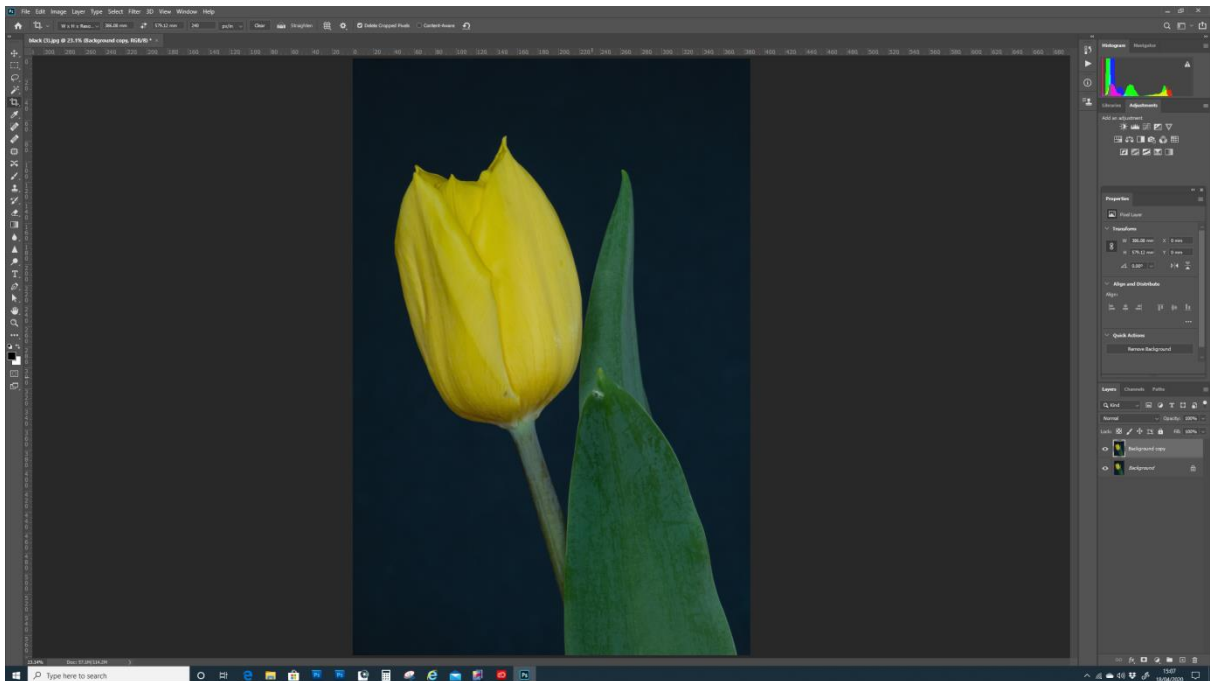
Method

Step 1 – create an infinity curve using something like an A2 sheet of black or charcoal cartridge paper. Alternatively drape black cloth behind the subject. Place your chosen subject well in front of it and take your shot.

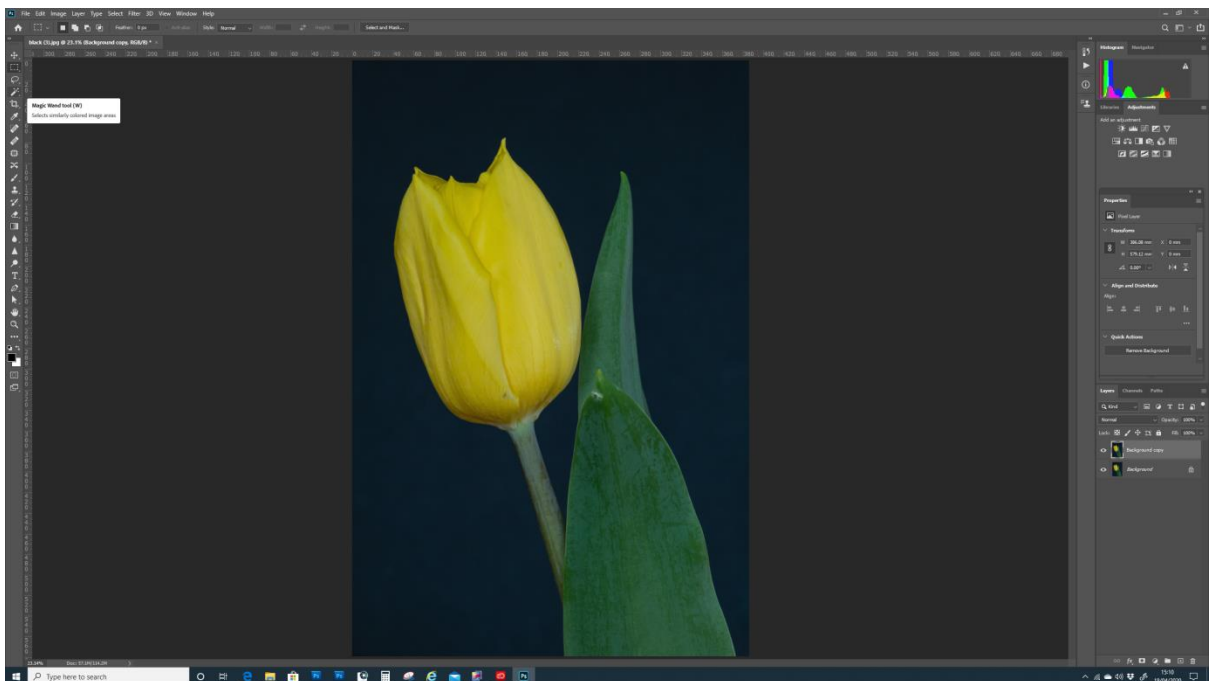


Best to meter using Spot metering on the flower this will ensure you expose for the subject. If you use Centre Weighted or Average metering the camera will render the black background as grey and may over expose the subject.

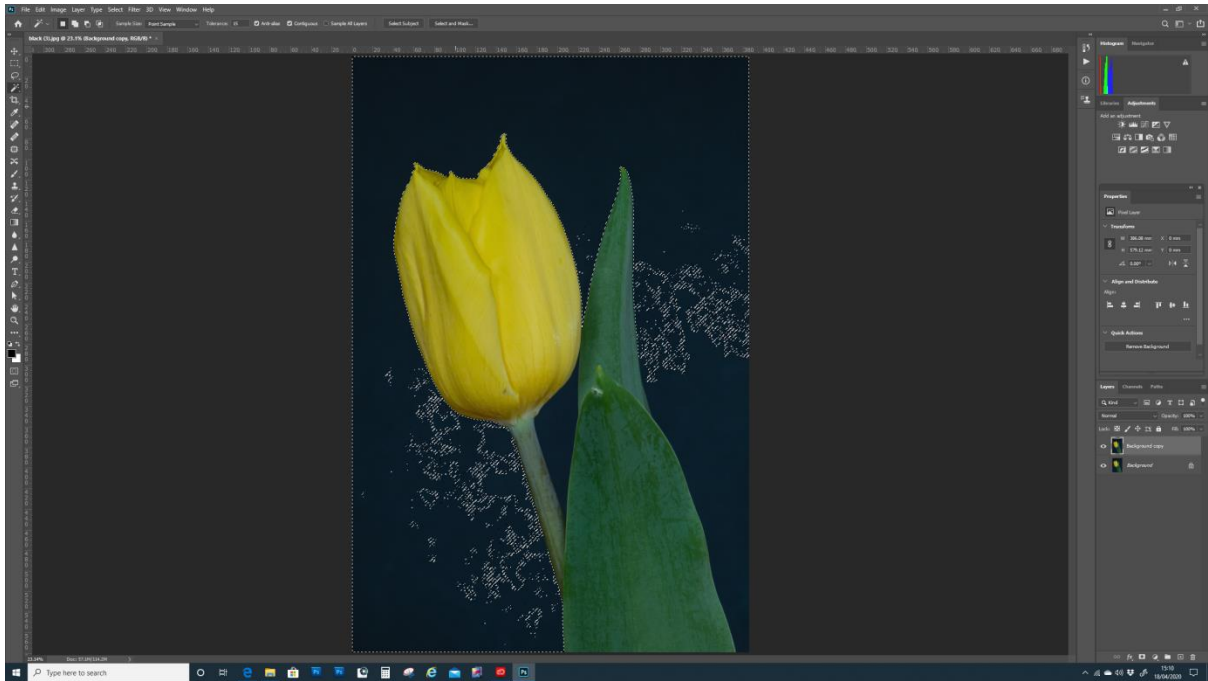
Step 2 – if you shot in RAW process the chosen RAW file to your satisfaction and convert to JPG. Open the JPG in Photoshop and crop it if necessary. Once you are happy duplicate the image.



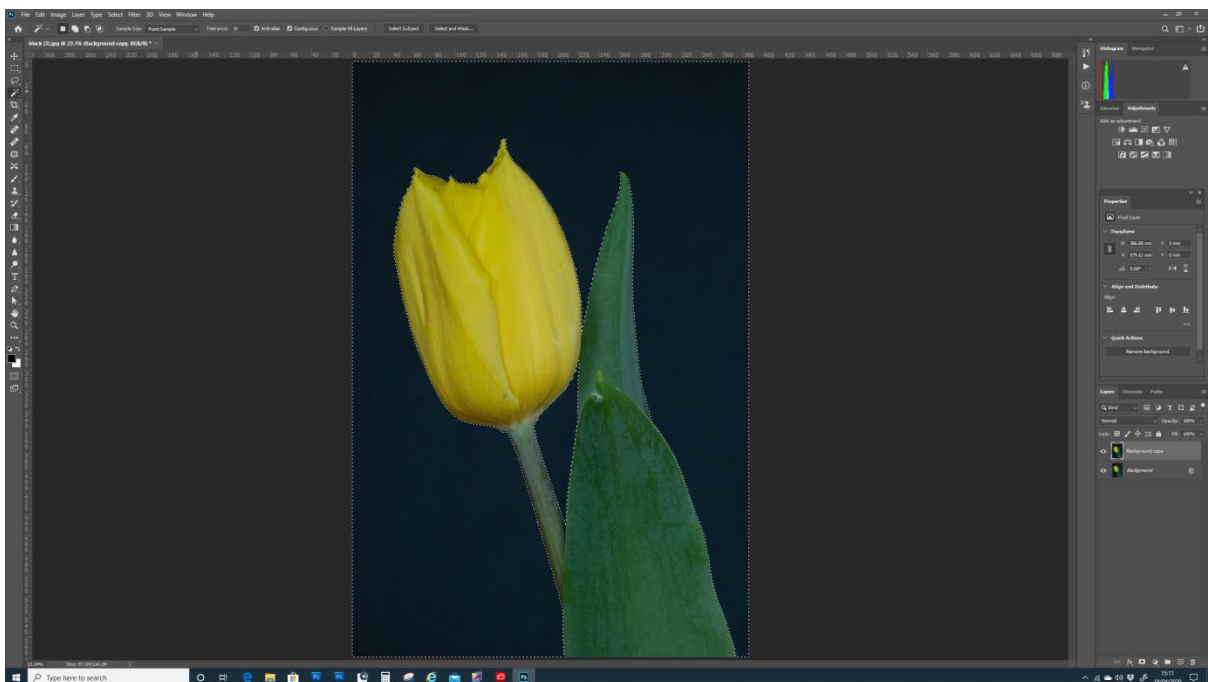
Step 3 – now select the Magic Wand Tool and in the middle command line at the top of the screen make sure Sample Size shows Point Sample and set Tolerance to about 15. Then click anywhere in the black background and the Magic Wand will start selecting.



It may not pick up all the background at first, if not (like in the image on the next page) hold down Shift and you will see a + sign appear next to the Magic Wand icon. You can then

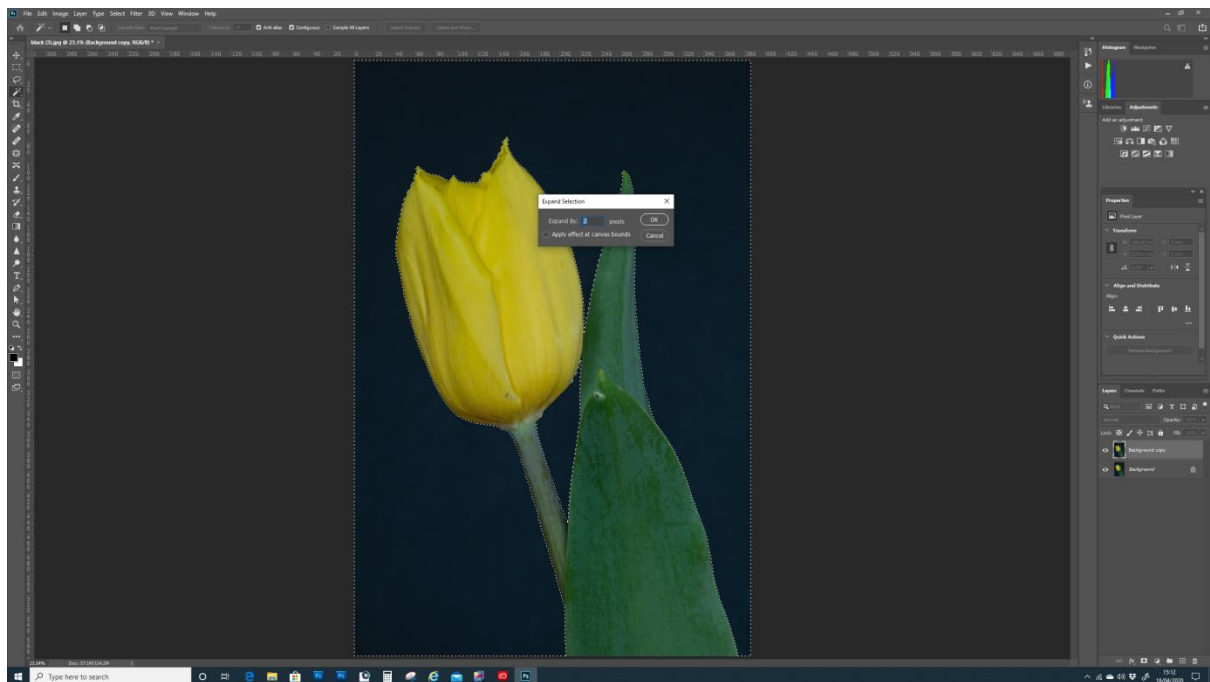


continue clicking in the remaining background areas, while holding down the Shift key, until the whole background is selected as shown by the marching ants. Don't forget isolated areas such as between the bottom of the tulip and the leaf. It should look like this:

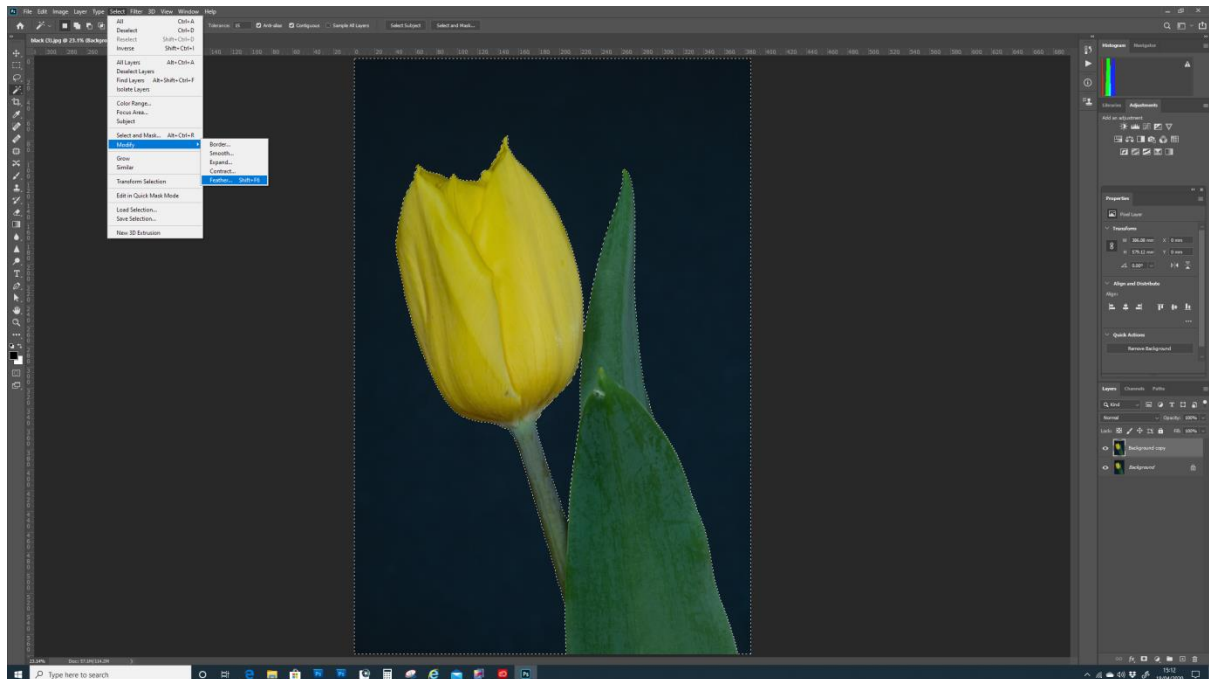


Once satisfied all the bits you want to be black are selected move to Step 4.

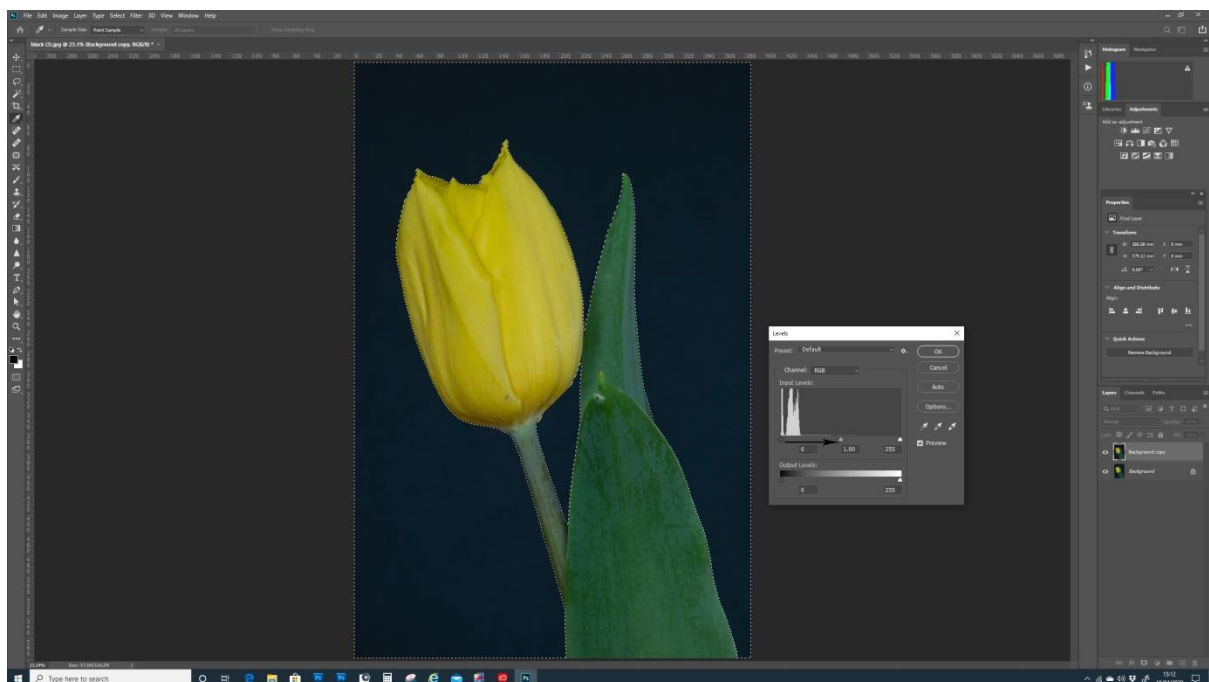
Step 4 – you now need to refine the selection so that when you make the Levels adjustment later it looks natural and there isn't a "hard" edge to the flower. So go up to *Select – Modify – Expand* and click *Expand*. Enter a value of 2 in the dialogue box that appears. This will make the selection bigger by 2 pixels so it fits more snugly to the flower.



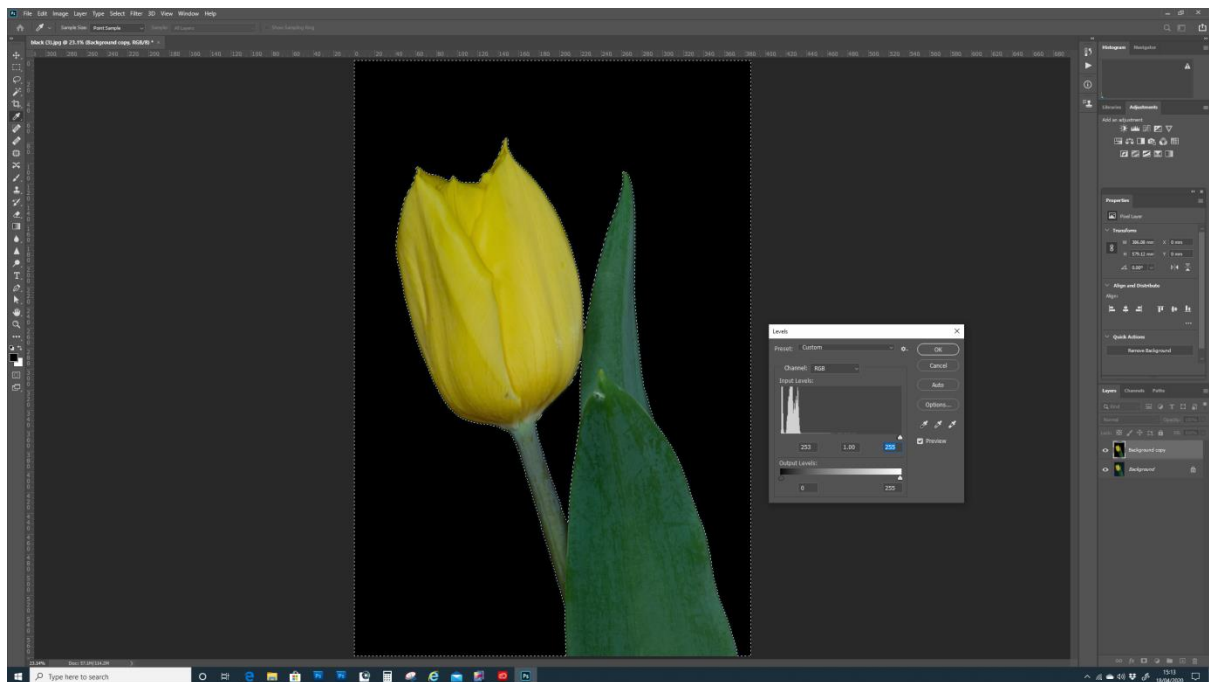
Now go again to *Select – Modify – click Feather and select a value of 10*. This will feather the effect of any changes in Levels adjustment and soften the edge.



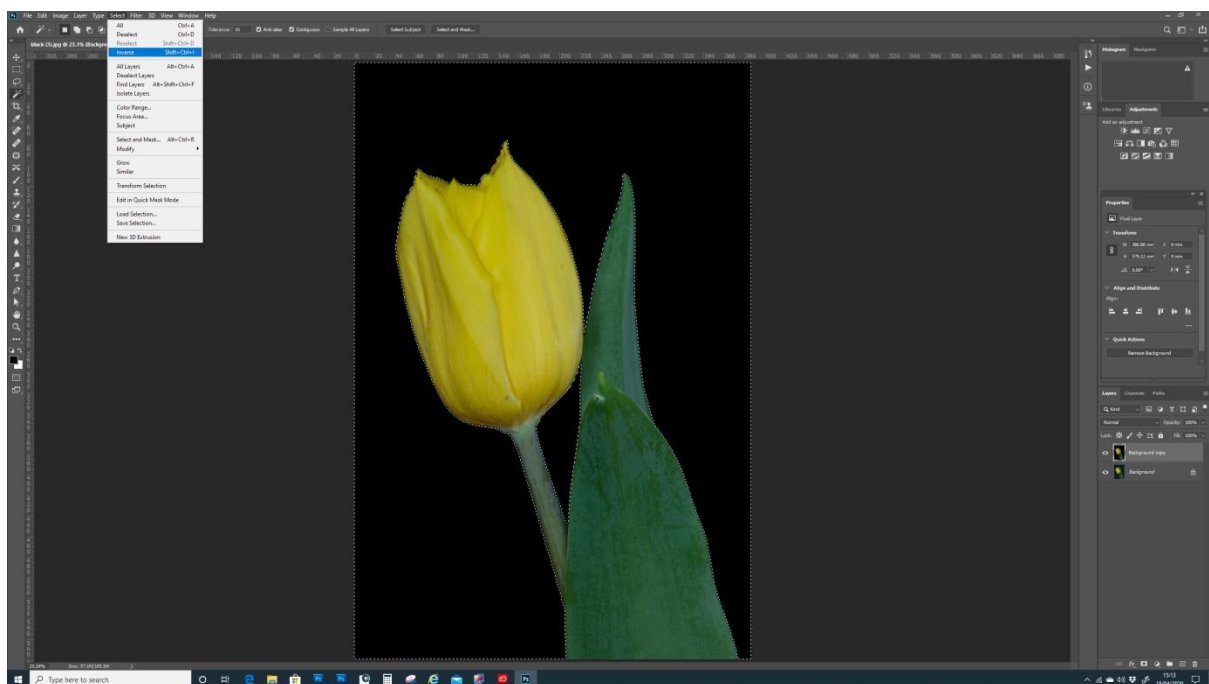
Step 5 – now the background has been selected, expanded and feathered it is time to turn it black. To do this go to *Image – Adjustments – Levels*. You will now see a Levels adjustment box. Click and hold on the grey triangle at the left under the white histogram and slide it all the way to the right as shown by the black arrow. As you do this the background will turn solid black from this:



To this:



Step 6 – now go to *Select – and click Inverse* This will change the selection from the background and will select the flower so you can make adjustments to that separately.



Now the flower is selected go to *Image – Adjustments – click Levels* and you can make Levels adjustments to the flower if necessary. You can then do the same with Curves if you want to make contrast adjustments.

Step 7 – once you are happy with the effect simply click *Ctrl+D* to lose the marching ants, flatten your image and save it in the usual way.

That is about it. You can use this technique with most images where you want a nice black background but it works best where the object is uncomplicated. So the tulip used here is great but if you tried it on a flower with multiple separated or very fine petals it would be much more difficult making the background selection and it may produce unacceptable results.

You can also use the same technique to create a bright white background. Just substitute a light background for your start photo then, when you get to the Levels adjustment part for the background pull the right hand control slider fully to the left and this will give you pure white.