These tips on use of the Magic Wand were obtained from Photoshop Masking & Compositing, pp. 52-54, by Katrin Eismann, Tips on Replacing Skies (11-21-05), by Jan Hedman, and Malakoff Diggin's & Cloud images are my own.

The Magic Wand is a simple Photoshop tool for making color and tone-based selections on a digital image … or so it would appear. The Magic Wand works best when the color selected is quite different from other colors & tones in an image, e.g., the color of a clear sky. This tool can provide a quick selection for some images, however it doesn't work as well for more intricate color-based and tone-based selections.

The Magic Wand has 5 settings that influence its behavior: Anti-alias, Tolerance, Contiguous, Use All Layers, and oddly enough, Sample Size on the Eye Dropper tool.

- **ANTI-ALIAS** smoothes the edge transitions between what is selected and what isn't. Unless you are selecting flat graphic colors, leave this "checked on" at all times.

- **The TOLERANCE setting primarily controls how many shades of brightness the Magic Wand includes in a selection. Settings range from 0—255, with 0 selecting only one tonal value and 255 selecting all shades (the entire image). The default is 32. Surprisingly, the Magic Wand doesn't look at color, but rather image channels in RGB, which are 3 grayscale images stacked on top of another. When working with color images, predicting what the Magic Wand tool selects becomes a complicated mathematical calculation, making it's behavior difficult to predict at times. The Magic Wand sometimes works as expected and at other times appears to have a mind of its own. I found the Tolerance settings to have the most influence.

- **CONTIGUOUS** is on by default and tells the Magic Wand to select only color/tonal areas that are directly connected to the point where you click. If you want all similar colors/tones to be selected, then "uncheck" the Contiguous box.

- **SAMPLE ALL LAYERS** determines whether the Magic Wand looks only at the active layer or searches all visible areas in a document.

- **SAMPLE SIZE on the EYE DROPPER tool** influences how large the initial area will be that the Magic Wand uses for its calculations. Set this for 3 x 3 Average, which will use a 9-pixel square.

Now let's look at some examples of using the Magic Wand:
REPLACING BLUE SKY WITH SOME CLOUDS
1. Open the photo for a new sky replacement. This works best for a photo that has a relatively simple skyline without a lot of leaves & branches in the way.

2. Make any adjustments to the non-sky area before changing the sky. Correct any hot spots.

3. Go to the Image mode and check the 8 or 16 bit depth of the destination photo. Make these images the same. Then go to Image Size to note the size and resolution of the images. Make these the same.

4. Be sure you are on the Background layer.

5. The Magic Wand was used because the color and tonality of the sky was quite different from other parts of the picture. Check the Magic Wand boxes at the top for Anti-Aliasing & Contiguous. Try different settings of the Tolerance number between 10 and 40 and click on the sky using the Magic Wand to see the effect. Use a Tolerance of 32 for the Malakoff Diggin's photo. To incrementally add more blue sky to the selection, hold down the SHIFT key & CLICK, or try SELECT — SIMILAR at the top or with RIGHT CLICK—SIMILAR.
6. Open a sky photo (source).

7. Make sure that the sky photo bit depth, size and resolution are the same as the destination photo (Malakoff Diggin's). Change the source if necessary.
   HINT: Click on the Window— Arrange both the source and destination files to be open on the desktop at the same time so you can switch between them.

8. Click SELECT ALL for the sky photo.

9. Press CTRL-C or EDIT COPY. This puts the sky selection into memory.

10. Switch to the destination file (Malakoff). The Magic Wand selection should still be in place with "marching ants". Go to the EDIT menu and choose PASTE INTO (not Paste command).

11. The new sky will be pasted into the selected area over the "old sky" on the Destination photo.

12. A new layer will be created automatically when you use this process. While still on the new layer, you may use the POINTER/MOVE tool and reposition the sky around until you are satisfied with it's placement. You can also adjust the Opacity (under the Layers Palette) of the new sky to blend it into the destination image. The resulting "new sky with clouds" photo is shown on the next page.
SELECTING IMAGES WITH MORE INTRICATE COLORS & TONES

The Magic Wand is easier to control and predict when working with grayscale images. Inspect the 3 RGB channels by pressing [CTRL + 1, 2, 3] and then use the single channel with the greatest tonal difference to make your selection. Activate the red channel by clicking on the word “red” in the Channels Palette and use the Magic Wand with a Tolerance setting of 40 to select the leaves. I found it necessary to repeatedly use the SHIFT Click Add-In feature of the Magic Wand to capture most of the leaves. It also may be necessary to backup a step occasionally because the dancing ants appear on the ground outside the leaves. The image used is extremely complex, and is probably best attacked using another tool like the Magnetic Lasso.