

Light it up

Experience the ambience and magic of outdoor lighting and enjoy your garden all year round

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There's a number of important elements that go into creating a garden or outdoor living space. Outdoor lighting is one of these elements and is an essential component for those of us who want to extend the use of our gardens after dark.

To experience a whole new ambience in your garden, the key is to incorporate some form of outdoor lighting. The lighting used outside our homes has different requirements from the interiors, says Jeff Kierman of Lighthouse Albany.

Lighting is most commonly used in the garden for safety. At night, when visibility is at its lowest, lighting can assist in navigating around the garden and alerting one to potential hazards, such as steps.

In addition to practical applications, lighting can also be used to add interest and drama to a garden, creating ambience and drawing attention to focal elements such as water features, sculptures and feature walls. Some people, however, make the mistake of over-lighting their gardens and, as a result, lose the subtle definition that lighting can bring to an outdoor space. "The aim is to enhance the garden and create depth and shadows," says Jeff.

There are many different types of lighting devices and products available to illuminate your garden. Depending on the purpose and the atmosphere you want to create, anything from candles, garden torches and oil lamps to regular halogen or solar-powered and LED lights can be used.

Whether you're renovating an existing garden or designing a new outdoor space, you're sure to find a lighting option to suit your budget and garden style. It's advisable to consider your lighting requirements during the planning stage of your garden design and construction. Lighting should form an integral part of your garden rather than be a last-minute addition. It's also a good idea to consult a lighting professional to ensure a successful end result.

Over the years, there has been a notable change and advancement in lighting technology. The main change is the increasing use of LED (light emitting diode) lights.

"This technology allows for vibrant colours and various uses such as stair and path lights, bollard lighting, spots and many other applications," says Jeff. In addition, LEDs are also more energy-efficient than regular lights, making them an environmentally friendly alternative.

Another popular option is solar-powered lights. These are particularly effective in places where there is no electrical connection. Interesting lighting effects can be achieved with solar lights, but the appeal of solar lighting lies mainly in the cost savings →

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associated with using a natural source of power.

Most lighting used in the garden is low voltage. A transformer will convert normal household power from 230-volt down to 12- or 24-volt, making it safe and relatively easy to install.

“From a practical perspective, you should have your conduit and wiring placed before decks are built, lawn is installed and paving is laid,” says landscape contractor, John Eagleton of Outside Edge. “You should also have a clear idea of what the area will be used for, as this will determine the amount of light required and the appropriate type of fitting needed to achieve the desired result.”

Experts agree that function over form is best when it comes to lighting your outdoor space. With the right combination of lights and techniques, however, you can showcase plants, accent water features, pools, statues and other garden features, and provide safety and security in the garden.

“Shadow is as important to your lighting scheme as the light itself, so don’t try to light everything,” says Ross Peden of Lighting Pacific. “Instead, retain some mystery and keep it subtle — very bright garden lighting can look brash and artificial.”

Lighting designer Jenny Pullar agrees. “One well-designed light will do more to enhance your garden at night than a dozen badly placed lights.” Jenny’s specialty is the use of tinted glass lenses to enhance the colours within the landscape. If lighting is incorporated properly, outdoor landscapes will take on a whole new mood at night.

Different areas around your property will have separate lighting requirements. Entertainment areas, for example, require a more subtle form of lighting to create atmosphere. To achieve this, try to angle the light away from your lines of sight to avoid glare in seating areas. For cooking areas,



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such as around barbecues and outdoor kitchens, a stronger light is required so food can be prepared easily.

Where security and safety are required, such as around entrances, driveways, pathways, steps and pools, you should opt for a low-glare light fitting to avoid creating unnecessary brightness. “Using a pathway light or an eyelid light will ensure that the light is directed in a downward direction onto the surface to be illuminated,” says Ross.

For plants, dramatic effects can be created using backlighting, otherwise known as silhouetting. Placing a light source behind a feature plant will define its outline, yet its detail will remain shrouded in shadow. A translucent object such as foliage will shine with the right lighting.

“It’s important for the light source to be hidden from sight; a good design is when you see the effects of the light but not the light fitting itself,” says Ross.

There are many simple ways to effectively integrate lighting into your garden. With an array of options available, lighting can add a magical dimension to your garden and enhance your overall outdoor living experience, both during the day and at night. ■



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1 At night, this waterside garden is spectacular and provides a relaxing haven to entertain in.

2 White LED lights provide a soft illumination that spills down these eye-catching entrance steps.

3 A warm, ambient light is created using outdoor oil lamps. Spotlights placed at ground level illuminate the subtropical foliage behind.

4 Lighting can be used as a design feature in outdoor settings.

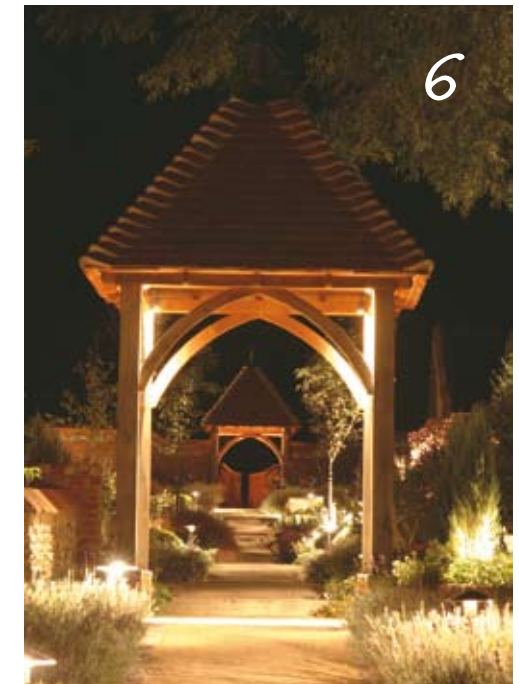
5 The use of lighting adds drama and interest to this design element.

6 With the right lighting, architectural structures such as this can produce dramatic and stunning effects at night.

7 Subtle, upward lighting helps set the mood in this outdoor space.



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