



Outdoor Lighting for Landscaping Gardens

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The installation of garden lighting is a most rewarding undertaking. Carefully position lights to highlight features such as a water garden, specimen tree or shrub, or to illuminate a decorative screen wall where the delicate tracery of the wall's pattern will be emphasized by the play of lights and shadow. Perhaps the most fascinating aspect of exterior lighting is that you can extend the enjoyment of living 'outdoors' well into the late summer evenings. But lighting can also be put to a more severe or practical purpose to provide light for walks or steps, or simply to illuminate the terrace or patio.

Outdoor lighting kits

Outdoor lighting in a garden has been considerably simplified by the availability of special kits containing all the necessary parts to ensure a neat and quick system. The need to have absolute safety where electricity is concerned is covered by the use of a low voltage arrangement whereby the main electricity from the power source is transformed down to the safe voltage of 12 volts. Any outside (water proof) sockets will require a separate fuse in your fuse box. All materials used for outdoor lighting must be weather resistant and lamp housings carefully sealed. If, on the other hand, it is intended to use mains voltage throughout the layout- say for decorative lanterns or street lamps-then it is always advisable to call in the services of a qualified electrician to undertake all electrical connections. It is also advisable to check with the local electricity authority to make sure that your fittings comply with their regulations. A typical garden lighting kit comprises one or more lamp units plus fixing brackets or ground spikes, as well as a generous amount of special cable. In some cases tinted lens covers are available.

The low voltage system means that there is no need to dig out special trenches for cables and there is, therefore, a substantial saving in time and effort. The cable can be left on the surface of the soil or lightly covered with soil. It can be taken round obstacles quite easily, and as most of the cables are coloured green, they blend well with plants. The special ground spikes enable lamps to be used at ground level and the lamp holder adjusted to throw the light at a particular feature. To illuminate a terrace, you use the wall mounting brackets provided with the kit. The transformer, that must be under cover, is powerful enough to take up to six lamps so, starting with a two lamp kit; the gardener can add more lights later on upto the maximum of six. Writing up the lamps is a simple operation.

In some versions, the cable is placed across the rear of the lamp housing and the cover screwed into the place. Special 'teeth' bite into cable as this is done, thus making the electrical contact. A more conventional system has the cable ends screwing into terminal blocks or connectors within the lamp. Another system, that operates off mains electricity and so does not use a transformer, has double insulated lamp holders moulded in synthetic rubber. It also has lamps on a support leg with base plate and ground spike. Double insulated cable is used here with a special moulded two pin plug and extension cables are available with connections so that more lamps can be added to the layout. The cables should be buried 45-

60 cm under the soil. The floodlamps are 100 watt and lamps in red, blue, green, yellow or clear are available. The clear floodlamps can also be used at 150 watts. This particular outfit is the only one that is safe enough for the lamps- and only the lamps to be used underwear.

Water Garden outfits

Some of the most beautiful lighting effects can be achieved with special water garden lighting outfits. Here the lamps are carefully sealed so that they can be either floated on the water's surface, or weighted to provide underwear effects. Lights are usually sold in pairs connected to about 1.8 m of cable with a further 3.3 m or so of cable connected to one of the units for connection to a low voltage transformer that should be situated outside the water feature. The lights here are available in colour combinations of amber/blue; red/ clear and red/green, providing a versatile range of contrasting shades. An interesting and very handy device is a flexible 13mm rubber tubing ring with perforations. It is attached to the water pump in a pool and when placed on one of the floating lights, produces a delicate 'ring' fountain effect through which the lamp's beams shine.

What to illuminate?

The first thing to do is to take a careful look at your garden and select those features attractive enough for illumination. Compare the focal points in your garden, such as any ornament, a screen wall, specimen tree or shrub even the driveway if flanked by colourful borders and light up some but not all of them. Don't get carried away with too many colour clashes; a scheme using just blue and white lighting is often the most effective. If you have a water feature, this can of course be illuminated to good effect, especially a fountain.

Once you have decided on which features to illuminate, the lights should be placed approximately in position and then connected to the wiring. The next stage is the most important of all adjusting the throw of the lights to achieve the best effect. This will be, to a certain extent, a matter of trial and error. Try to 'enclose' a specimen tree, for example, in a cone or beam of light. For this, you need to place the light near the base of the tree with the lamp angled straight up into the foliage. If you want to illuminate a low feature such as a border or wall you should 'spread' the light.

For a long wall you will require a series of lamps, angling the lamp heads so that, in the case of a patterned screen wall, for example, the light and shadow created emphasize the attractive patterns, giving a three- dimensional effect. A lamp or two hidden away in the flower borders can produce a dramatic effect, picking out the leaf patterns and casting a warm glow over the colourful flowers.

Lighting adds to the pleasure and entertainment of a garden, making it possible to eat outdoors after dark or give party barbecues, and indulge in midnight bathing if you own a swimming pool. Long after dusk you can also continue playing such popular garden games as bowls, croquet, clock golf and hide and seek for the younger members of the family.



