

get out of the dark

ADD BEAUTY, SAFETY AND SECURITY WITH LOW VOLTAGE LANDSCAPE LIGHTING

BY GARY MENENDEZ

join the nocturnal

Picture yourself in the garden after dark. Plants that you've hardly noticed before compete in a shadow contest on the wooden fence, and stack stone walls vie for your attention by showing off every nook and cranny that the chipmunks love to explore during the day. A waterfall takes on a hypnotic quality, mesmerizing you by its motion much like those fireplace flames in

January. You are part of the nighttime garden now and you're sharing it with others. You realize this as you hear the katydids sing and the owl hoot in the distance.

Sounds too good to be true? It isn't. With a little bit of planning, some late night experiments with a flashlight or two, and some help from a reputable lighting dealer,

you can do it and have it all and never again be left in the dark.



DOWNLIGHTING

why low voltage?

Low voltage landscape lighting is easier to install, safer, more affordable, versatile, and energy-efficient than yesterday's 120 volt schemes.

> SIMPLICITY

Basically, low voltage is ordinary 120 volt household current stepped down to 12 volts via a small transformer box that plugs into any regular grounded outdoor outlet. For your do-it-yourself set up, you'll also need UF (underground feeder) cable plus fixtures that connect with the cable and house the light bulbs (commonly called 'lamps').

> SAFETY

Simply bury cable directly beneath the mulch. Low voltage lighting needs no conduit, so you won't risk injury if the wire gets cut by accident.

> FLEXIBILITY

Since there are no junction boxes or conduits to fuss with, your system is flexible. You can loop some extra wire at the base of fixtures. Then you're free to move them around and feature new focal points as the seasons change.

> VISIBILITY

If you have any outdoor steps or elevation changes that you or guests must contend with, you had better make sure they're well lit. Sure, your friends may not sue you after they do a forward roll down the walk but what about the pizza guy?

> SECURITY

Neighborhoods are different today than they were twenty years ago. Most just aren't as safe. There are plenty of statistics out there supporting the belief that outdoor lighting deters crime. Security lighting doesn't always have to mean 100 watt spotlights at all four corners of the eaves. Simply illuminating a drive, walk, or some trees can be enough to show unwanted guests that you can indeed see what's occurring on your property after dark.

MAINTAINING THE MOOD: Five Tricks for Easy Upkeep

What can you buy today that requires no maintenance? Very little. Luckily, the small amount of upkeep your lighting system will need can be done in just a few minutes a couple of times each season. These five tricks take the chore out of lighting maintenance and make upkeep easy:

1. Always keep spare lamps. Whenever you buy one replacement bulb, buy two instead.
2. Replace lamps every few years. Their intensity dims with age, so don't wait until bulbs burn out.
3. Spray a silicone-based lubricant on the threads of screw-in lamps. This makes replacement simpler and prevents corrosion.
4. Buy the largest transformer you can afford but don't be too concerned with having all of the options. A timer on the transformer is more important than a photocell. When performing routine maintenance, you'll want to turn the system on manually during the day and be frustrated if the lights won't switch on before dark.
5. Make sure your connections are watertight right from the start. This prevents short circuits, and saves future aggravation. Although standard

wire connectors are usually satisfactory, if the connection is in a particularly damp area, consider a DBY (direct burial unit). This small gel-filled tube is a more watertight device.



PATH/SAFETY LIGHTING

A general
rule for
land-
scape
lighting
is 'see
the
effect,
not the
source.'

dramatic and dazzling

Lighting offers more than just practical advantages, though. It casts glimmers and shadow, ripples and silhouettes to drench your garden with beauty and mystery. Here are some techniques to highlight your own garden's delights and switch on that very magic.

> MOONLIGHTING

Mimic the dreamy quality of moonglow. Place bullet fixtures high up (at least 20 feet) in trees so light filters through branches, casting shadows on the ground. For the best effect, try two or more long-lived quartz halogen lamps.

> GRAZING

Celebrate the eerie beauty of a birch tree's flaking bark, a mossy brick wall or other texture-rich object. Skim light up against their surface to magnify intriguing irregularities. PAR 36 well lamps or bullet lamps at ground level are best for this effect.

> SPOTLIGHTING

Shine a spotlight on a star attraction such as that intriguing contorted filbert but don't overdo it. Too much wattage "erases" your focal point by washing out interesting detail.

> SHADOWING

Place a graceful willow tree or clump of ornamental grass in the path of a spotlight's beam to cast fascinating shadows on a light-colored wall.

> SILHOUETTING

Emphasize the distinctive shape of a Japanese maple by lighting the wall behind it. Against the glowing backdrop, your plant looms dark, mysterious. For best effect use a lamp with a wide beam spread.

> MIRROR LIGHTING

Go for the dramatic. Instead of submerging a light in water gardens (which highlights suspended debris and keeps your goldfish awake), keep the surface in a pool of tranquil darkness, lighting background rocks and foliage instead.

> PATH LIGHTING

Limpid pools of light are well and good, but don't forget about safety! Walkways lost to darkness, and dim steps between lit

areas are accidents just waiting to happen.

Incandescent 1156 lamps can minimize the abrupt visual changes you'd get from focused beams. They create a softer effect—and are cheaper than a lawyer.



STEP/SAFETY LIGHTING

ILLUMINATING INVESTMENT: Equipment and Fixtures

One of the best features about low voltage landscape lighting is how easily it can be retrofitted into any garden. All you need initially are a couple of grounded weatherproof outdoor receptacles for plugging in the transformers. The rest can wait until you can afford this worthwhile investment. Although a professionally-installed lighting system costs about \$3500 today, the do-it-yourself alternative is satisfying, easy, and saves about forty percent in labor costs. Here are some tips for getting your money's worth:

- **Beware of ultra-cheap "bargains"!** Steer clear of those enticing little kits offering 10 tier lights and 2 floodlights for the low price of \$59.95. After a few years of exposure to the elements, many of these fixtures become brittle and crumble. Transformers (the brain of the unit) can fail along with the photocells which are supposed to turn your lights on automatically.

- **Show off — sometimes.** Should you purchase ornate, hand-forged works of art or opt for the simple but sturdy fixtures?

If your fixtures will be in plain view (path lights, for example), buy ones that will enhance your landscape's appearance night or day. But for fixtures that will be out of sight, let durability be your main concern. A general rule for landscape lighting is "see the effect not the source."

- **Go easy.** When it comes to outdoor lighting, remember "a little goes a long way." A 50 watt bulb may not seem like much when you consider most lamps inside your home are probably 60 watt, but a funny thing happens when you bring light into the outdoors. By contrast with the surrounding darkness, the light seems to take on a brighter quality.

- **Learn the Lingo.** When shopping for landscape lighting, you're more likely to find what you need with the least confusion if you're familiar with a little terminology:

QUARTZ HALOGEN

These long life lamps beam a bright white light that's energy efficient. The MR 11 and MR 16 are the two most common in landscaping. They are ideal when you want a bright focused beam, for example when uplighting, down or moonlighting.

INCANDESCENT

This lamp with its yellowish glow is our common household bulb. Use these where you want low levels of light, for example, path lighting. An 1156 (car taillight) is often your best choice.

PARABOLIC ALUMINIZED REFLECTORS (PAR)

These incandescent lamps have a built-in reflector and come in a wide variety of intensity and beam spread. Their light can give well lighting and ground uplighting a soft, subtle glow.



UPLIGHTING

To Brighten Your Nights

Lighting showrooms have pamphlets and staff to guide you.

A free pamphlet, "A Guide to Outdoor Lighting," is available from Toro by calling 1-800-321-8676.

The Landscape Lighting Book by Janet Lennox Moyer, John Wiley and Sons, Inc.

From Ortho Books comes another helpful source of information, *How to Design & Install Outdoor Lighting*

For literature on the Ambiance low voltage lighting used in these photographs call: Sea Gull Lighting at (609) 764-0500, ext. 292

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