





# Get Out of the Dark

Landscape lighting lets you enjoy the magical transformation that takes place outdoors after the sun goes down

By Garry Menendez, University of Tennessee

**W**hen you hear the term “landscape lighting” what image comes to mind? Unfortunately, for most, you think of the do-it-yourself home improvement center lighting kit for \$59.95. This is not landscape lighting. This is short-term decoration. To me, landscape lighting is more than that. The fixtures are cast aluminum or other durable metal and the transformers (the boxes that step down the voltage from 120v to a safe 12v) have several user-friendly features and come with a substantial warranty.

Low voltage landscape lighting is easy to install and improves the value of your home as long as you buy quality material. Some of the brand names to look for include: Hadco, Kichler, Focus, Nightscaping and Ruud, to name a few. The investment for this type of lighting can be hefty, especially considering that a good transformer alone can cost \$200, but when you consider the benefits received (safety, security and beauty), investing 2 percent of the total home value in outdoor lighting is worth every cent.

Landscape lighting can be divided into four basic categories: uplighting, path lighting, grazing and downlighting. The difference between a quality path light and one of the kit path lights is beam spread. With the kit lights, the light source is four inches from the ground and it takes a zillion of them to do any good (and you also face the problem of stray 747s landing on your front walk). The light source



on a quality path light is at least 12 inches above the ground, thus requiring less of them to do the job. Uplighting and grazing can be pretty much the same. The only difference is that with grazing, you shine a light across an interesting surface such as stone or brick. Uplighting accent trees is very effective, but keep it balanced and avoid lighting everything in sight. I used to be a fan of downlighting (positioning lights high in trees to create moonlit shadows on the ground-plane) until I saw how easy it was to damage the tree. Now I say avoid it. Any time you pierce the bark of a tree with any kind of fastening device or risk allowing copper wire to come in contact with the wood, you're asking for trouble.

**Low voltage landscape lighting is easy to install and improves the value of your home as long as you buy quality material.**



## Get Out of the Dark



The transformer is the brain of any lighting system. It signals the lights on and off through the use of a built-in clock or photocell or both. If you select a transformer with both of the features, your lights can come on at dusk and go off at a specified time. The standard wire gauge for a "typical" lighting system is 12 gauge. The smaller the gauge, the greater the flow of electricity that can be carried. The pre-fab lighting kits come with about 18-gauge wire, which means you can't put too many lights on one wire run. During installation, you may want to leave enough wire slack to allow some key lights to be moved, therefore shifting the focus to different plants at different times of the year.

The point is, we sink a lot of money into our landscapes and gardens. It just makes sense to plan a budget that includes quality low-voltage landscape lighting so you can fully enjoy the magical transformation that takes place after the sun goes down. ✿

# PPF

Popes Plant Farm, Inc.  
800-682-2085

*Offering a Wide Selection  
Of*

**Bedding Plants**

- Begonias
- Celosia
- Dahlias
- Pansies
- Impatiens
- Marigolds
- Dianthus
- Dusty Miller

**Hanging Baskets**

- New Guinea Impatiens
- Fuschia
- Supertunia
- Pink & Purple Wave Petunias
- & Many More!

*Now Available For Fall: Hardy Mums & Fall Pansies!*

- Mums in 6, 8, & 10 inch Pots
- Pansies in 606 & 1204 Packs

**P.O. Box 123 • Rockford, TN 37853**



## R & B NURSERY

*Specializing in:*

- Dogwoods
- Flowering Pairs
- Shade / Ornamental Trees

**Call: 615-597-5135 • Fax: 615-597-4751**  
**109 Braswell Lane, Smithville, TN 37166**