

GARDEN DESIGN

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THE
ENTERTAINING
GARDEN

Night Lights

By Deborah Hufford

Velvet darkness and soft pools of light — these are the magic ingredients of a dramatic nightscape. Add to these the music of laughter and tinkling iced drinks, and you have a memorable party setting.



Top: Night lighting helps choreograph an evening mood in Eileen and Harold Graham's Newport Beach, California, garden. Garden and lighting by Ed Garza, Rene Grivel (ASLA) & Associates. Above: Imaginative lighting creates a surreal quality in this seaside California garden. Garden design by Kevin Fleming, Rogers Gardens. Lighting design by Michael Collier, Night Shadows.

Light is a form of creative energy, yet home owners are often in the dark when it comes to this relatively inexpensive means of decorating. Lighting can be used to choreograph a party's mood and movement. If you want a quiet soirée, subtle, intimate pockets of light will encourage small groupings of guests. If a large, lively party is the order of the evening, flamboyant, sparkling lights would be desired, along with a well-lit central area.

"Do-it-yourself outdoor lighting is a trend that's on the upswing," says Rob Beachy of the Toro Home Improvement Division based in Minneapolis. "Low-voltage outdoor lighting is safe, simple and affordable." (Low-voltage refers to lighting powered by household current but channeled through a transformer that reduces the current to a very safe 12 volts.)

Popular types of landscape lighting are post lights, traditional round spotlights, mushroom-shaped lights and Orientally inspired styles. Filters can be added to reduce glare or for colored effects. These types of low-voltage lighting kits can be purchased at hardware stores, lawn and garden centers and some nurseries.

Home owners who want a high-powered or elaborate lighting system should hire a professional landscape illuminator, says John Watson of John Watson Landscape Illumination in Dallas, Texas. Fixtures installed under water or in high places also require professional expertise, he adds. Watson has illuminated the estates of celebrities such as Donald Trump, Johnny Carson and Jane Fonda, and even larger projects, including Busch Gardens and Niagara Falls.

"One of the biggest mistakes novices make when trying to light their property is not being able to foresee the master design plan," says Watson. "Home owners should consider that they are actually painting with light on a black canvas. Whatever they light is the emphasis in the



The dramatic effect of crape myrtle trunks, lit from below, is doubled by their reflection in the pool of this Fort Worth, Texas, garden. Landscape and lighting design by Richardson/Whitney Associates.

picture they are painting. A potpourri of jumbled lighting effects can create discord. My philosophy for lighting is one that creates a quiet, sophisticated mood.”

When planning a lighting scheme, draw a scaled plan of your garden or entertainment area on graph paper, suggests Beachy. Sketch in living areas, walkways, statuary, shrubs and other features. “Keep in mind the functions you want the lighting to serve.” For festive lighting, “look at the area you want to light in terms of focal points and lines of sight. Is there a natural line that your eye follows during the day that you’ll want to emphasize with accent lighting?”

Beachy also suggests experimenting with different lighting schemes before permanently installing the fixtures. When it's dark, "try different arrangements until the lights create the mood you're looking for," he says.

Effective night lighting employs a variety of approaches. *Contour lighting* is achieved by situating two or three focused beams at different angles around the periphery of a feature. Objects with interesting sculptural qualities — trees, statues, fountains — are good candidates.

Grazing is a subtle technique of brushing light beams across a surface to emphasize texture. Plants take on fascinating textures at night. When kissed with light, lilies become pearl-escient trumpets; petunias become frothy waves; ferns are luminous feathers. Light barely grazing tree surfaces is especially dramatic, emphasizing brawny bark and sinuous limbs. Other possibilities are wall textures such as rough stucco or barn wood, vine-covered walls and rock gardens.

Backlighting is achieved by placing the light fixture behind an object, silhouetting its shape and casting shadows beyond it. *Up-lighting* focuses the beam upward. This technique is often used with bushes and trees. *Down-lighting* directs light toward the ground and is often used to define larger areas. *Cross-lighting* entails two beams of light mounted directly opposite each other on each side of a feature. This method provides promi-

nent lighting of an object or an area. *Moonlighting* — shining light from a high point such as a tree or roof peak — is an effective way to diffuse light and create emphasis. *Diffused light* can also be achieved by using several sources of nondirectional light, such as post lights or ground lights.

Following some basic rules will ensure that your lighting is a shining success. Illumination for a party should be both functional and aesthetic. Ground lights or post lights will illuminate walkways and protect bordering flower beds. Dangerous ob-



stacles, ledges or steps should also be lit for safety. In areas that are mowed or trimmed, make sure wires and cables are sufficiently protected by soil, turf or gravel.

When lighting for aesthetics, be careful not to overlight an area. Use restraint and simplicity and, remember, light works *with* darkness to create drama.

Never direct light so it glares at oncoming traffic or guests. Try to reduce glare with filters or conceal lights under plants or behind tree foliage. Be considerate of your neighbor's privacy; don't shine bright lights directly toward windows.

Sometimes, the lights themselves are the focus. A wide range of stylized light fixtures are available, from vintage or replica Victorian street lamps to redwood-finished lighting for the rustic look. Oriental-style lamps lining a garden path add understated sparks of accent light. Simple post lights lend a clean architectural feel, whereas Colonial-style tin-punch lamps create a "country" flavor. Hanging Japanese lanterns can be very festive, especially if used in bright colors. And for the ecologically minded, solar-powered lights offer some interesting stylistic alternatives.

Whatever the style, consumers will find a wonderful variety of nightlights, many at affordable prices. When it comes to nightscaping, "You're really only limited by imagination," says Rob Beachy. In fact, it could be said that decorative night lighting is only a filament of our imagination. □