

Lights for Long Winter Nights

by Rita Pelczar

SHORT WINTER days mean long dark nights. Whether winters are cold or mild where you live, chances are, you'll still want to enjoy your garden as much as possible, so it's a good time to add some lights, which can serve a variety of functions. They can be placed where they will draw attention to the areas of your landscape that you want to highlight—such as a piece of sculpture, a specimen tree, or the boundaries of a raised bed—or to create dramatic silhouettes of plants against walls. Putting lights along paths and steps helps you and visitors navigate safely.

I am partial to solar lights. Because they tap the sun's rays for power, solar lights need no special wiring, so they are easy to install. And as long as the sun shines on them long enough during the day to charge their batteries, they usually provide plenty of light from dusk, when they automatically turn on, until dawn, when they shut off. These days, there are plenty of good solar-powered garden lighting options available to fit your needs and garden's style.



Solar Deck Lights

While the word "steps" appears in neither name, I like the **Solar Deck Lights** from Gardener's Supply Company (www.gardeners.com) and the **Solar Fence Lights** from Lights.com (www.lights.com/outdoor) for illuminating steps. Both come in sets of four, are



Solar Fence Lights

easy to install, and have low profiles that suit them to a variety of placements. Two screws secure each light for a flush mount against stair risers. (Of course, these fixtures can also be mounted on fences, decks, or walls.) On my stone front steps, I simply set the lights on the outer edge of each tread where they won't be stepped on. The Solar Deck Lights, which are available in either a silver or bronze finish, are rectangular, with an angled front that directs the solar



Brown Metal Solar Path Lights

collector upward toward the sun and the light downward. The Solar Fence Lights, which are available in brown or white, work in a similar manner, but are round with a curved face.

There are lots of solar path lights available that differ in style, finish, durability, and amount of light they produce. The simple clean lines of the **Heavy Duty Stainless Steel Warm White LED Solar Path Lights** from Lights.com work well with my garden's style and cast a soft glow along the



Heavy Duty Stainless Steel Warm White LED Solar Path Light

stone paths. The set of four lights are a snap to install. Simply pound the supplied plastic stake for each light into the ground and fit the metal sleeve of the light over it. Although I've seen such solar path lights placed equal distances apart along one side of a path, I prefer a more random arrangement. The light they provide is substantial enough that the pathway is visible without giving it a "runway" appearance.

If you prefer a Mission style in your path lights, consider the **Brown Metal Solar Path Lights (with Wall Sconce Converter)**, also from Lights.com. These sturdy and attractive metal-and-glass lights come in sets



Solar Lotus Lantern

of two and can be installed in the ground or as wall fixtures using the supplied adaptor mounts. When it gets dark, the units turn on, casting a pleasing geometric pattern of light on the ground below.

For tabletop or deck use, I like the **Solar Lotus Lantern** from Plow & Hearth (www.plowhearth.com). This 14-inch-tall lantern with textured panels casts a soft subtle glow that sets a pleasant mood without interfering with your stargazing. It includes a built-in holder for a battery-powered tea light of your own if you want additional illumination.

The limiting feature of the above-mentioned lights is that the col-

PROPER DISPOSAL OF SOLAR LIGHTS

Solar lights don't last forever. Depending on their quality, you can probably expect to get between one and six years of use from a solar light. Be sure to dispose of the used batteries properly; they should never be placed in the household trash. Take them to an appropriate waste drop-off site. If your solar fixture uses halogen or compact fluorescent light (CFL) bulbs, these too should be handled as hazardous material to be separated from household trash. Alternatively, solar lights can often be recycled like old computers, cell phones, and other electronic products. For more information and to locate recycling and disposal centers in your area, contact www.call2recycle.org or <http://search.earth911.com>. —R.P.



lector and light are housed in a single unit, so they must be placed in a sunny location in order to charge the solar battery. The collector should face the south for best results, particularly in winter when the sun is lower on the horizon.

To brighten an area that doesn't get much sun, or on the north side of your house, look for solar lights connected by a thin wire to a remote collector. The **Superbright Solar Spot Light** from Gardeners Supply Company is great for adding a focused beam of light to shadier paths—as long as the collector can be positioned in a sunny spot within a 15-foot range of the light. It can also be used to create dramatic uplighting effects by directing the light's beam through the branches of trees. The light is housed in sturdy, weatherproof, anodized alu-

minum, and the high-capacity batteries keep the light charged for several days even on days when there is little sunlight. Outdoor lighting can contribute to both safety and enjoyment, but a good indoor plant light kit can keep you in fresh herbs



Compact Tabletop SunLite® Garden Kit

all winter, or give you a head start growing plants from seed for your spring garden. It's not solar-powered, but the **Compact Tabletop SunLite® Garden Kit** from Gardeners Supply Company can't be beat for tight spaces. At 25½ inches long and 15¼ inches wide, it's perfect for a countertop or small table. The sturdy aluminum stand provides easily adjustable height control of the low profile fixture, so the lights can be kept at the optimal distance from your plants. Also included are two full-spectrum T5 light bulbs and a watertight tray to hold your potted herbs or seedlings.

It may be winter, but with all the options I've covered here, there's no excuse for your outdoor—or indoor—garden not to shine.

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Superbright Solar Spot Light (solar collector in background)