

let there be
LIGHTS

**Why should
your landscape
disappear at night
when you can add
dramatic appeal
and interest at
little cost?**

BY RICHARD RIX

The arrival of the spring equinox is a reminder that the hours of daylight now exceed those of night and will stay that way for many months to come. This might encourage you to dismiss the dark but that would be a pity, for even at the height of summer, outdoor artificial lighting is an effective and economical way to

enhance the night-time landscape and extend the pleasure you derive from it. As well, night-time lighting brings a year-round measure of security and safety to your home, by deterring intruders and by illuminating pathways, steps and entry points.

Compared with sunlight, outdoor lighting is feeble indeed but it does allow you to take charge in a way that is impossible with sunlight. You can highlight what you want and conceal what you don't want. You can do wonderful things with regard to space and perspective and add points of drama wherever you like.

As mentioned in my book *Make a Splash!* (Macmillan Canada, 2001), there are five main ways to describe artificial night-time lighting that is used for decorative effect, and they may be remembered by the acronym, "FADES." The five are:

1. Focal, which is synonymous with drama
2. Ambient, which creates mood
3. Dynamic, which brings life and movement to your surroundings
4. Expositional, where the emphasis is on the object doing the lighting
5. Shadow, which suggests mystery.

Let's discuss each of them briefly.

■ **Focal lighting** illuminates a particular object or group of objects, to make it stand out. Statues, water features and large plants are obvious contenders, and a pleasing effect is often achieved with up-lighting – generally a powerful spotlight aimed upward from the ground. A halogen bulb can work wonders here. Focal lighting is also the kind of lighting that is often used for security purposes.

■ **Ambient lighting** is perhaps the most flexible in that it is the garden's great mood setter, encouraging active use of outdoor space when used brightly, or conveying a sense of romance when it is subdued. An excellent way to achieve ambient lighting is from above, such as high from tall trees, so long as you are careful that the foliage doesn't interfere. Ambient lighting is



sometimes used as grazing lighting, playing across the surface of an object such as a textured wall or the bark of an unusual tree.

■ **Dynamic lighting** is lighting that moves, twinkles or changes colour and intensity. It is best used with swimming



pools or other open water, for reflective gains. You can also create a pleasing effect by wrapping strands of plain Christmas lights around a small tree such as a birch and enjoying the sparkling effect when the wind blows.

■ **Expositional lighting** is when the object doing the lighting is itself highlighted, for decorative reasons.



With other forms of lighting, you don't want to see the source, just the effect it creates. With expositional lighting, the attention turns to the light, or lamp, itself. Sometimes an ornamental light can add sparkle to what would otherwise be a dreary night-time spot, especially if you choose something ornate, such as a Japanese lantern or a Victorian gaslight.

■ **Shadow lighting** is self-explanatory and may be used for achieving some highly dramatic effects. One neighbour of mine has positioned a spotlight a few feet in front of a simple garden bench, allowing



Photo: Landscape Planning by Judith Adam



the shadow to play right across the front of his house. The effect is quite startling and attracts the eye of just about all who pass by. Effective garden shadows are often created when cross-lighting from two or more lights plays upon an object. The shadows then tend to be softer and more mysterious.

While on the subject of night-time interest in the garden, never underestimate the power of white, particularly white flowers, which can look beautiful even in dim light, such as from street lights. It often pays to have a bank of, say, white impatiens planted just for the purpose.

You can be extremely creative when installing lighting, and some of the results can be just as dramatic in the winter garden, so you might wish to keep the lights on year-round. If you use low-cost, low-voltage lighting (12 or 24 volt), it won't cost you an arm and a leg, and you will have eliminated the potential for electric shocks

and the need for heavy-duty wiring.

As well, while it is good to mix the various forms of lighting that we have discussed, don't go overboard and wash out areas with light. The point is to enhance those areas, not obliterate them. And do have consideration for the neighbours, for they will certainly not wish to have their bedrooms illuminated by your lights! That's not to say that you yourself shouldn't enjoy your outdoor lighting from indoors, for that is half the fun of it.

Night-time lighting will of course encourage you to spend more time outdoors after dark, which is fine, though you may have to take precautions against mosquitoes and other bugs, which may be attracted to the new artificial environment that you have created. 🍂

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Photos: Landscape Planning by Judith Adam and The Tranquil Garden, Country Living Gardener



DID YOU HEAR...?

- Each year, every one of the 15 million cars and light trucks on Canada's roads pumps more than four tonnes of pollutants into the air, reports Environment Canada.
- Almost six million of Canada's population is aged 14 or less. Just under 14 million are 15-44. Around 11 million are 45 or older.