

# Take It Outside

New trends in landscape lighting show that when it comes to extending warm summer nights, the answer is in the lights.

By Shanna Casey

**W**ith gas prices approaching record highs, more cars are staying parked in their respective garages this summer season. Your customers are eager to head outdoors to enjoy longer days and warmer weather — in their very own yards. To help them prepare, we spoke to several outdoor lighting experts about what's sure to heat up yards this summer.

## Improved Technology

The biggest trend right now in landscape lighting is LEDs, says Tommy Herren, better known as the “Lighting Geek” and frequent guest on HGTV and DIY Network. “LEDs have come a long way in matching the color and intensity of what consumers are used to seeing,” Herren says. “They’ve gotten so good that I can put an LED and an incandescent in the landscape and the customers can’t tell which is which.” While the cost of LEDs is still a little high, Herren says people have to take into account the money they’ll save on electricity, particularly in states like California where energy bills are so high.

In addition, LEDs require a smaller transformer and less wire, so installation is cheaper, Herren says. LEDs also have a longer life, meaning homeowners can go longer without having to replace the fixtures. Brooke Perin, Certified Lighting Specialist at Wolf Creek Company, says LEDs last about 40,000 hours on average, which if used six hours every night, comes out to 18 years. “[The longer life] is a huge benefit because if you’re mounting these lights on trees or houses, you don’t have to keep climbing back up there to change a bulb,” she says.

## Softer Lighting

Another trend in landscape lighting is more subtle lighting, says Paul Gosselin, President of the Association of Outdoor Lighting Professionals and President of NightScenes Corp. “People are starting to go with softer lighting with more of a romantic feel, which means moving away from high-voltage fixtures in favor of smaller, low-voltage fixtures,” Gosselin says. These smaller lights can be tucked away behind planters and patio walls to give an overall soft glow without people being able to see the fixtures.

## Professional Designs

Gosselin has also noticed an uptick in the number of people having their

landscape lighting professionally designed. He attributes this to the lackluster housing market, which has led people to focus on improving their current homes instead of buying a new one. “Since homes now have lower values, people are trying to improve and update them,” Gosselin says. “Improving the outdoor lighting extends their outdoor hours, and according to a National Assn. of Realtors study, can increase the home’s perceived value by 20 percent.”

Extending outdoor hours is especially important in the southern states, where it is often too hot to be outside during the day, Gosselin says, so homeowners want to be able to enjoy their yards at night. Perin agrees, saying people want to create a relaxing haven in their backyards. “The whole idea is to make your outside area more welcoming and more of a refuge,” she says. “People are working long hours and getting home late, but they still want to be able to enjoy their yards.”

## More Creativity

Using LEDs also gives customers more options as far as wattage increments and color. “There are RGB fixtures on the market that we can dial to match the exact color we want,” Herren says. “It’s becoming more decorative instead of just functional.” LEDs also provide more flexibility in regards to light levels. “As consumers and designers, we’re effectively stuck on this 10, 20, 35, 50 watt scale, but LEDs will give us more options and the ability to play more with the light levels,” he adds.

The smaller size of LEDs also makes them ideal for tucking into smaller spaces around decks, outdoor kitchens or water fixtures. “With good landscape lighting, you don’t see the light source, you just want to see what is lit, and that’s where the artistry comes in,” Perin says.

## Safer LEDs

Another advantage of using LEDs is they give off very little heat, Perin says, which makes them ideal for decks and seat walls because people won’t burn themselves if they brush up against the light. LEDs also don’t give off infrared or UV rays, which means they don’t attract mosquitoes or other insects when used outdoors.

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