

Design Trends in Paving - **Garden Lighting**



Photos by Gardens at Night – Jason Edwards, photographer

What makes a garden a showpiece or lifts a landscape design to the next level and turns any ordinary space into something extraordinary? The answer lies in something not every landscape contractor will automatically think of, but it's something that can instantly value-add to the range of services you offer. A little forethought can go a long, long way to achieving client satisfaction.

Garden lighting is about creating drama, mood, prescience and transformation of the daytime space. With garden lighting, you can change the sense of depth, create new focus, new function, and best of all, a whole new look to the garden. As a contractor, you may be wondering why you need to think of it at all, but as designers are fast learning, the service of considering lighting as part of the total overall picture of a landscape project is fast becoming the norm and certainly one not to be ignored.

Garden or landscape lighting can turn any garden into something really special. It's often the overlooked cousin of other aspects of design but is just as important as any other

element. It should be thought of prior to construction to ensure all the correct provisioning and installation needs are made before it's all too late or too costly to reverse. When you think about it, a garden is only half done if there's no lighting. Most often a garden - especially for entertaining - is used in the late afternoon and into the evening. So it should be the natural question of any landscape contractor to enquire about garden lighting when taking on a new project.

Aside from function lighting like a spot light for the washing line, garden lighting can create all manner of effects. You can uplight trees along a winding driveway, create sharp definition of a feature tree glowing majestically in the lawn, wash lighting over pathways and planting, define changes of level in steps, add movement with submersible lighting into a water feature and achieve elements like soft glows, colour changes or pin point accurate focal lighting. Lighting can also tie back into the exterior of the house or outdoor structure with similar effects defining the lines of the architecture or entry to a home.

Landscape feature **Garden Lighting**



Rather than being seen as a chore or 'just another thing I need to do', it should be looked at as another part of your professional service - a way of value adding to what you already do. A few conduits and some forward planning is all that will be required from you, but the impression you can make is one of a conscientious contractor that has the client's needs at the forefront of your thoughts.

A good lighting design naturally starts with a plan, and most commonly, the landscape design will be accompanied by a lighting design. If not, there are several lighting companies that will provide you with a specialist lighting design service. With the client's consultation, their needs and wants can be met. Less is more, is of course the mantra for any good design with the outcome being a good mix of functional lighting and effect lighting. The end result is most often a garden that redefines its looks with some, not all, of the garden being featured and lit. A good lighting design will make any garden - large or small feel more intimate, more personal and more alluring.

In terms of construction, there is little more for you as a contractor to do than integrate your workflow with that of a follow-on electrician. Common trenching can often be used



for low voltage cabling alongside irrigation and 240 power obviously needs to be installed correctly and well before most other items. Transformer location will also have an impact on the finish of the landscape construction and much like irrigation installation - if placed in the right position, they disappear in the garden, but if not, they stand out like you know what.

The best advice is to have a professional lighting designer consulted, prior to construction. Good contractors develop a rapport with these value-adding services. The outcomes from getting to know what each of you need to do to achieve the best job is a more efficient installation overall. Lay the groundwork now and the rest will follow.

Plans can be prepared that will indicate the entire layout of the garden, the fittings required, the cable size and length plus the right transformers for the job. The lighting design will also show the switching groupings and a full breakdown of each zone and cost components. All that's really left to do is have your qualified electrician install the lighting and provide internal switching wherever the client wishes it to come from.



The question ultimately comes to budget and of course, it should be the landscape designer's role to inform the client of the budget allowance for lighting when preparing the design. By seeking professional advice and assistance, you can have a fully itemised costing for your quotation purposes. So as a contractor, always ask the questions about lighting design at the start of a project, during quotation or tender phase, so nobody gets any nasty surprises.

By thinking ahead, for yourself and the client, it allows each of you to get the most out of the total project. Allowances for switching and dimming can be critical to the end effect of a good lighting design yet it is often cut back or deleted simply because to cut it out of the project saves money and time. The aim is not always to make the installation as easy as possible but rather to make the most of the site for the client.

Lighting can also need tweaking, and in the case of an upright to a feature tree, it may mean the lighting location, when on a spike, will need to be tweaked over time. For project handover, take the time to visit your completed construction in the evening so you can see the lighting design to its full effect. Your attention to detail with the odd shift here and a re-adjustment there will go a long way to securing your client's recommendation.

The end result should be a brilliant landscape construction job that includes well- executed lighting. The image of a garden with the soft glow of light will make it all the more alluring for you and for your client. Make sure you grab some photos of the garden in all its illuminated glory and by taking photos just on dusk, you'll be able to capture the garden in all its detail as well as show the full effect of the garden lighting. These images are sure to become the stand out showpieces of your portfolio or web page, and you'll wonder why you never thought of working in garden lighting into every project. **LG**

