

Light Fantastic

Enjoy the garden for longer, highlight its features and transform the atmosphere of any situation with carefully chosen and well-installed lighting



Warm-coloured lighting and plenty of candles create a welcoming area for outdoor entertaining.

Introducing lighting to a garden can completely transform it, not only after dark, but year-round. A garden that is well-lit in winter, as well as on those balmy summer evenings spent outside, truly becomes a garden for all seasons: bare branches are mesmerisingly picked out by light, frost sparkles. Lighting options abound but the mantra to remember is less is more. Pick out key features, highlight beautiful trees, or create ambience around outdoor entertaining areas as you would in the home.



TREES AND PERGOLAS Positioning lights at the base of tree trunks or pergola posts is an easy way to create drama. Mark Gregory of Landform Consultants, the award-winning landscape firm that has also built medal-winning gardens at shows such as Chelsea, has this advice. “If you want to light a big canopy, you need a lamp with a wide beam. The housing is the same, but it is the lamp within that will give you the angle.” For Mark, good lighting is about being able to see the effect of the light, not the light fitting itself. Setting the lights into lawn, as here, is a good way to hide the fittings. “They need to be sunk by about 80mm,” he says, to stop lawn-mower damage, and some maintenance will be needed to keep grass from growing over them. “Pushing spikes into the lawn would be a cheaper, easier way to do it. This is more work but the result is seamless clarity. In-ground fitting is always best.”



CAMOUFLAGED Where it can be hidden by planting or rocks, a painted spike-mount light will work well for highlighting trees and pergolas. Kew Exterior LED spotlight, £182, johncullenlighting.com



SUNKEN Recessed, adjustable uplights are ideal for setting into lawns or paving but keep grass trimmed. Olympus 70 recessed uplight, £300, lightingforgardens.com



CONTEMPORARY Brushed stainless steel, copper and matt black each provide a neat, inconspicuous finish. Kestrel ground spot with ground spike, £64.80, detaillighting.co.uk

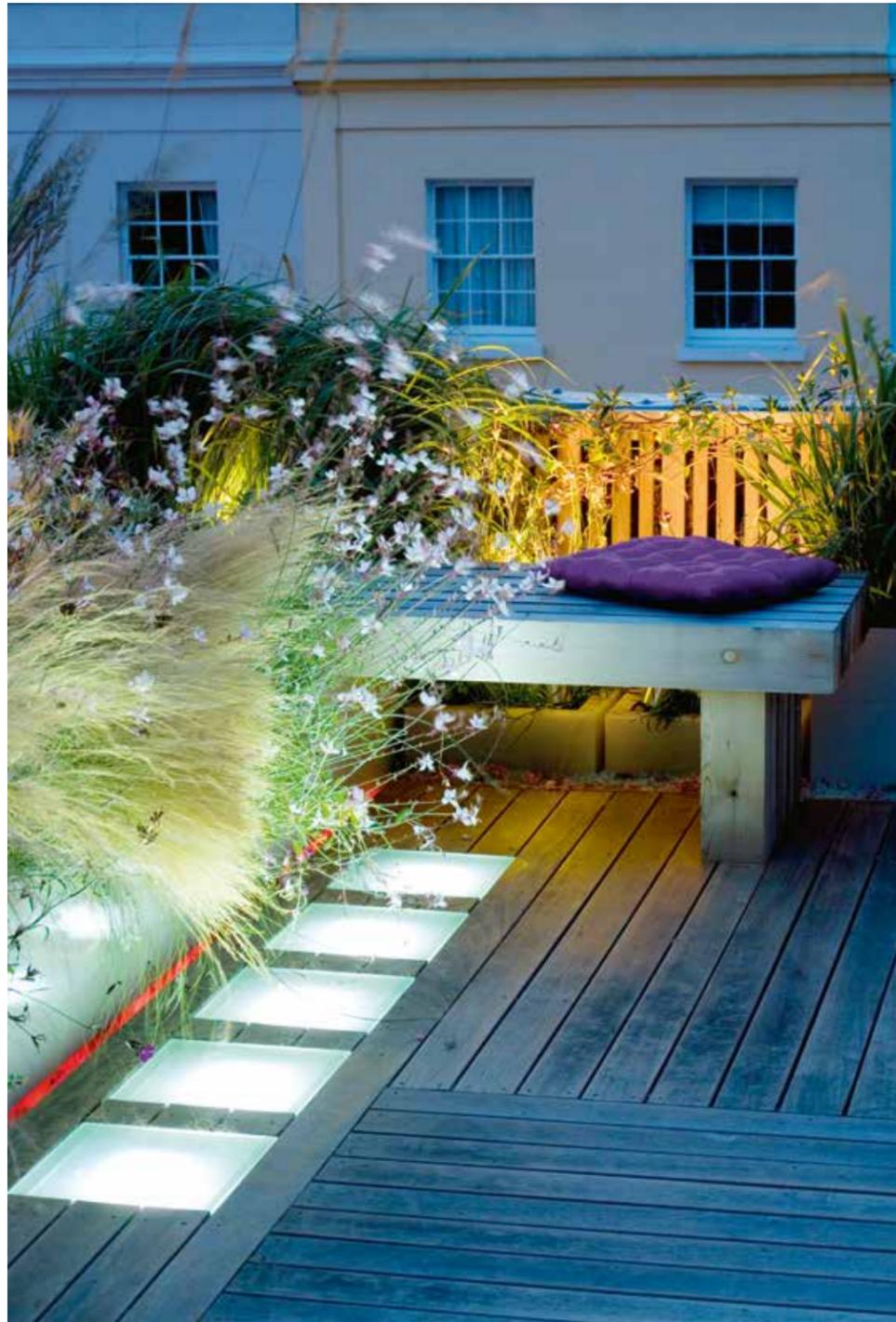


STEPS AND WALKS The best lighting effects come with forethought and planning, says Mark. Here each step has been illuminated with a strip of LED lighting set into a channel in the underside of each stair tread, something that can only be done when the stairs are built. “You could retro-fit using stick-on strips of LEDs,” Mark says, “but how long it would last is questionable.” The alternative is to install lights in the steps’ side walls, which would be easier to do retrospectively. “Get cabling put in when the garden is first built,” Mark urges. “Even if you don’t know the effect or the lighting you want, for a little extra expense you’ve got flexibility, and you’re future-proofed. The cost pales into insignificance compared to putting it in later, and digging things up to put cable in is heartbreaking. Choose armoured cable with a core value that gives you different switching options and you can pre-install three or four circuits within your garden. Mark them on the plan so you remember where they are.” Most garden lights nowadays are LEDs, which run on low voltage cable from a transformer, tucked away in a border or behind a shrub. “LEDs now are so functional, cost effective and long-lasting,” Mark says. “Old light fittings used to suffer from condensation and fluctuations in temperature. LEDs don’t, they use a safer low voltage so they don’t cost as much to run, and they’re cold to touch, so they won’t burn plants or children’s fingers.”



INSET A discreet, low-glare, angled steplight can be set into walls to illuminate flights of steps. Rienna LED outdoor steplight, £155, johncullenlighting.com

IMAGE GAP PHOTOS: ELIHE BORROWSKI/NICOLA STOCKEN



PAVING AND DECKING “You can buy a lot of off-the-shelf products now,” says Mark. “With the popularity of outdoor entertaining, lighting has become more accessible and with LEDs so rarely breaking down, more people are prepared to install lighting.” The other good thing about LEDs is that for very little money, remarkable effects can be achieved. “Have fun, use colours – before you’d have to change lamps, now thanks to the technology that has become affordable,” Mark says. Thanks to LEDs, these light boxes set within decking will be cold to the touch. “You can walk on them and your feet won’t burn, there’s no water ingress because everything is sealed, and they give a lovely diffused light,” Mark says. A strip of coloured LEDs adds a party atmosphere. “Another development is remote control,” says Mark. “You can control all your lighting from a simple hand-held device.”



MULTI-COLOURED Mini ground lights for marking paths or adding colour (available in orange, blue, green, red and white). Small LED marker lights, from £39 each, collingwoodlighting.com



SLABS Where there are no walls, pick out paths or paving features with lights that are integral to the hard landscaping. LED recessed floor light, £60.90, lights.co.uk



WALL-MOUNTED A contemporary wall light, hand-cast in solid brass with an LED bulb, is good for installing in stair walls. Newport downlighter, £154, jim-lawrence.co.uk

EXTERIOR WALLS If a light fitting will be visible, make sure it is a good looking, quality fitting. “I would avoid anything too cheap and cheerful,” Mark says. “Cheap fittings won’t last so it is worth paying a little bit more. You can buy affordable quality lights, such as products like Hunza and Collingwood, from local stockists. Less is more; use fewer fittings but of better quality.” The devil is in the detail, however. Once you’ve invested in quality fittings, try to avoid spoiling the look with visible cabling. Chasing cables into a wall will always give a sleeker finish but is hard to do once the wall is built. “If your house is new-build, have the cables put through to exterior walls.” Another point he makes about downlighting is that the light can reveal flaws. “The downward wash will show any indiscretion in the brickwork, rough stone or poor workmanship.” Downlighting can still be used to create wonderful effects, however. “Moonlighting is something we do a lot,” he says. “You put a light fitting high up in a big tree and shine it down. You can’t see the source, but you get wonderful shadows on the ground.” One thing not to do, Mark advises, is confuse security lighting with garden lighting. “Big, bright flood lights do not create an ambient mood,” he cautions.



PONDS AND FOUNTAINS Water features demand light fittings with a higher ingress protection (IP) rating than regular lights. Specialist suppliers can advise if the fitting rating allows it to be fully submerged. “You can get some very interesting effects when you use lights in water,” Mark says, “but you also get a lot of refraction as the water takes the power of the light away, so consider the strength of the lamp.” Options include lighting the water from within, to create a dappling, rippling effect, or simply shining a beam onto the water. Remember that the effect of a lighting scheme can be doubled if lights are reflected on an expanse of still water. Always use an electrician qualified under ‘Part P’ building regulations to install mains electricity outdoors and properly certify the work. Find one at napit.org.uk. Garden lights running on 240V electricity supply need their own circuit from an existing or new fuse box, which must be protected by a residual current device (RCD). ■



ROBUST Try a using a discreet, stainless steel spotlight for fountains and waterfalls. Micro underwater light, £78, lightingforgardens.com



WATERTIGHT An underwater light is ideal for picking out fountain details. Modux One Pond Spot, £168, lightideas.co.uk

IMAGES GAP PHOTOS: CLIVE NICHOLS/ELKE BORKOWSKI