

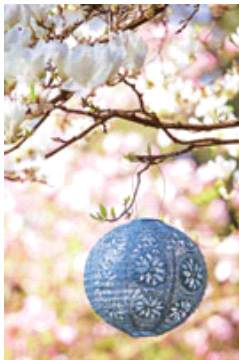
Features

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Improving the Ambience

Jennifer Polanz

As people (and magazine photo shoots) get more creative and funky with their outdoor living spaces, so, too, does the lighting that adorns those spaces. Lighting used to be relegated to commercial landscape lighting or candles. But today, there are so many more options for consumers to provide them the kind of ambience they want in their gardens, patios and other outdoor spaces.



What's Trending?

"This year we are seeing a greater use of varying materials in outdoor lighting," says Jamey Allsop, head of the home and garden division at Allsop, which specializes in a wide variety of products, including lighting. "Producers are using coated ceramics, punched metal and other unique materials to create lighting effects.

"We are also seeing bright colors and the influence of the 'bohemian' look in some of the more decorative outdoor lighting. There are some really fun options available now."

Allsop carried that trend through in its latest introductions, including in the Soji Stella Boho solar lantern, made from Tyvek material. It adds to the garden or patio's ambience by casting ornate light patterns as it glows.

Pictured: The Soji Stella Boho solar lantern from Allsop in Sky Blue.

Another growing trend in outdoor lighting is how it's powered and that's leaning more toward solar, says Amy Mort, sales representative at Very Cool Stuff. "Because the solar powered is more economical, more eco-friendly, which is huge right now. And it's much easier to incorporate a small little solar panel than to hide the electrical cords, that kind of thing. So I would say the trend is going toward solar for the ambient lighting outside."

Vintage continues its spread into the garden and outdoor living spaces and Amy says she's seeing products like old-fashioned Edison-style lightbulbs making a resurgence (although some are actually LED).

And Jamey notes that in the future, the industry will likely see more of those LEDs and other energy-efficient

lighting options, as well as new technologies. “One of the primary trends in outdoor lighting coming in the near future will be integration of more technology into outdoor lighting,” Jamey says. “Alternate and more efficient power and charging methods for portable lighting, making the light more multi-purpose.”



Getting the Most Out of Your Lights

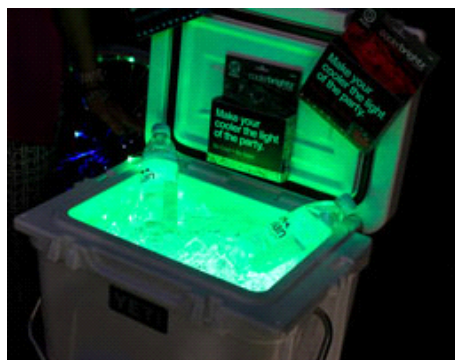
Lighting can be notoriously difficult to sell. Displays are difficult, particularly if something involves a solar light. What do you do to show off how it glows? “We get that question all the time with our solar products because it is so hard to show them during the day and you’re not usually open at night,” Amy says. Some of the retailers who carry her products display them in the bathrooms, which are typically dark until the light switch is flipped on.

Others have created “dark rooms” painted black or draped with black cloth to show off the illuminating glow of solar-powered lighting. “It’s not a bad idea if you’re going to get into the category,” Amy adds. “It does help sell the solar lights when you can see them working.”

Pictured: This inset dark room at The Gardener’s Choice in Tigard, Oregon, is an example of how to set off lighting in a dark area.

These products also can be difficult to photograph, so don’t be hesitant to ask your suppliers for photography to use in displays, on your website and to push out on social media. And speaking of social media, that’s a great place to showcase your lighting selection in action—and don’t just limit yourself to spring or summer, either.

“I think garden retailers could prioritize outdoor lighting and get creative, taking it from often times a seasonal category into a year-round sale,” Jamey says. “Garden lighting is relevant all four seasons, and with great lighting, customers can enjoy their gardens year-round.”



What’s New in Lighting?

Words & photos by Chris Beytes

Water, music and ... lights! Every patio and garden benefits from some illumination. And with today’s efficient LEDs, lights and lighting accessories are showing up everywhere, as we discovered at the National Hardware Show, held May 9 to 11 in Las Vegas. Here’s a sampling:

Brightz LTD (6798, 99)—Brightz offers miniature, battery-powered LED lighting for all sorts of things, from bicycles to beverage coolers (pictured). We especially like these “BugBrightz,” which mimic a jar full of fireflies. www.brightz-ltd.com



Marcelle Group—A manufacturer, plus distributor, of novelty lighting by Sharper Image, Polaroid and more, Marcelle Group offers lots of solar-powered LED options. This clever LED light/Bluetooth speaker gives your patio umbrella light and sound. Marcelle Group ships from warehouses in New Jersey and California. (646) 502-5699

Echo Valley—Ann Arbor, Michigan's Echo Valley offers a range of garden accessories. Those with lights include the After Glow kit, which lets you turn any beverage (okay, wine is nice) bottle into a twinkling hanging lantern. There's a mason jar kit, too. "Edi-Sol" solar-powered lanterns come in vintage shapes and colors and feature a convincing Edison-style bulb. A shepherd's crook is packed in the box. www.echovalley.com **GP**