

7 Ways to Improve Your Landscape Lighting Designs



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From Basic Landscape Lighting to Advanced Lighting Design

Many landscape contractors are now confident with designing and installing landscape lighting systems.

They've discovered that offering a basic package of fixtures with every landscape project gets customers to say "yes".

But what about the contractor who is ready to move beyond "basic lighting" to larger installations that bring more opportunities for design creativity and impact?

Central has compiled this booklet to share tips for taking your landscape lighting projects to the next level.



ADVANCED TIP #1:

Understand Your Client's Goals

Advanced lighting is more than a fixture count. Getting in tune with your client's needs is a good way to break the habit of "up-light here, path light here, etc."

Your client will have ideas on what he wants lit, or at least a feel for what needs to be accomplished. Ask more questions. Listen for what the client *desires*; not how they suggest you achieve it.

What should you ask about? First, find out what the client's overall priorities are. Some clients are focused on privacy and security. For those clients, lighting the perimeter of the property and key points of entry are essential. Other clients will be interested in creating more "show". For these, lighting the public face of the property—usually the front of the house and front yard—will be essential.

Then ask the client about how they and their guests use the landscape. Designs will incorporate lighting for circulation (pathways), safety, security, beauty and recreation. Not every client will want these in equal measure, so it's important to ask.

Next, inquire about preferences for more "natural" or "theatrical" approaches. Natural lighting emphasizes mainly plants, trees and boulders, with little focus on the house itself. Designs are more random (specific trees) rather than symmetrical or repeated. The light intensity is balanced and subtle. Theatrical effects have more impact and visual excitement. Customers that are looking for more of a resort-like appeal appreciate this type of lighting. Achieve it by using brighter fixtures to create sharp shadows, graze building surfaces and light facades and with repeated and rhythmic fixture placement.

Most importantly, determine the point-of-view. When they're in the house, what windows do they use to view the landscape? When they're outside, where do they usually sit? Understanding these viewpoints will help you design the best composition.

ADVANCED TIP #2:

Use Different Levels of Brightness to Create Visual Appeal

The most basic systems use one fixture and one lamp repeatedly. (For example, hardware-store kit systems.) A quick way to make your lighting installations more interesting is to vary the amount of light from each fixture, typically based on where the fixture is placed.

A good design uses three different light levels:

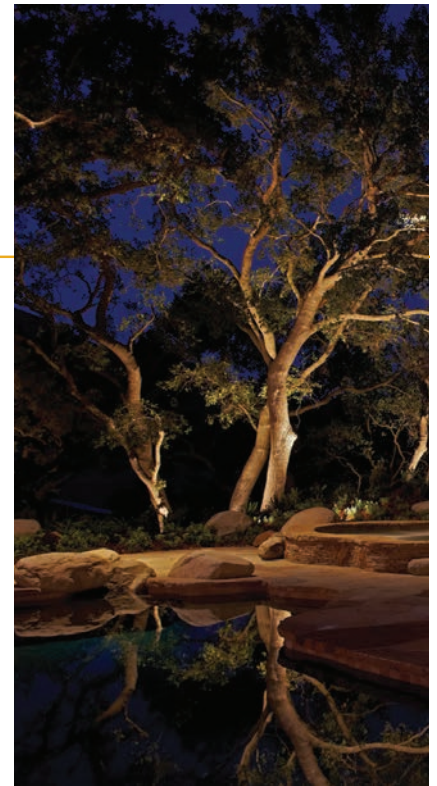
- **Low light:** for pathways and areas up close. The goal is to illuminate but not overpower. Avoid glare.
- **Medium light:** use this to define visual perimeters in the landscape (what is outside the perimeter will become invisible)
- **High light:** use this for objects far away from the viewer to create depth, or to create a specific focal point within things in medium range. Your eye will be naturally drawn to what is lit more dramatically.

ADVANCED TIP #3:

Visually Expand Even Small Yards with Horizontal and Vertical Space

Great lighting designs can make even the tiniest yard seem larger. Add vertical space by shining light upward into tall trees, particularly those far from the main viewing point. Often this will be a single tree or row of trees along one of the property boundaries.

Similarly, use fixtures with highest lumen output on the landscape elements furthest from the view point. The more intense light will draw the eye to the more distant object, expanding the focus and making the yard appear larger.



ADVANCED TIP #4:

Choose What You Want to Light (and What You Don't Want to Light)

You have the ability to create your own view of the landscape by being selective about what you choose to light and what you leave dark. Light naturally draws the eye's attention to positive features of the landscape. Features that are left dark disappear. Avoid making fixtures themselves the attraction; instead focus on what each will light.

Being selective on what you light creates visual rhythm. The essence of musical rhythm is a repetition of sound with silence in between. The same effect can be used for lighting when light/dark/light repetitions create interest for the eyes. Make use of features that repeat in the landscape or in the building's architecture: rows of trees or shrubs, columns, pillars, fence posts, etc.

Find special focal points by making the most out of the special things in your clients' yards: birdhouses, statues, flags, signs, etc. It's an easy way to create a lighting focal point and reinforce the client's personal style.

ADVANCED TIP #5:

Avoid “Hot Spots”

A “hot spot” is one area of intense reflected light which draws the eye away from the overall beauty of your lighting composition.

- Avoid aiming fixtures directly at a flat surface like a wall or boulder. These become instant hot spots. They also wash out the color and texture of the surface. Apply a grazing technique instead.
- Avoid trying to illuminate a large object with a single fixture. The one small area that’s lit (often a tree trunk) will appear as a hot spot. Instead use multiple fixtures for balanced cross-lighting.
- Always do a final aiming of fixtures to correct for unintentional “hot spots”.

ADVANCED TIP #6:

Make Use of Fixture Accessories to Control Glare, Add Interest

Take care to minimize glare by adjusting each fixture’s shroud to shield the light source from direct contact with the viewer’s eyes. Honeycomb louvers can also be used to control glare when the fixture surface may be at eye level.

Lenses can be employed to create different lighting effects. Frosted lenses soften light, creating a more subdued lighting effect. They can be especially for wall-washing where the harsh edges of the beam need to be softened. Colored lenses can be used to amplify the colors in a landscape: amber lenses create a warmer ambiance, and blue or green lenses can bring out the beauty of foliage.



ADVANCED TIP #7:

Plan Zones/Scenes

The days of “everything comes on at once” landscape lighting are quickly disappearing. Advanced lighting designs create multiple lighting “scenes” by grouping/zoning fixtures. This allows the same system to be tuned to the function(s) needed at that time. For example, path lighting can be separated from decorative lighting. Fixtures over cooking or areas can be activated only when needed and then dimmed once food is served.

Dimming adds another dimension of light management, enabling different levels of light too. This can aid in creating different lighting moods for different activities.

Get familiar with the different products that allow you to add zoning, dimming and color to your landscape lighting projects. These include specialized transformers, app-based controllers and programmable lamps. Most popular are control packages that offer the homeowner the ability to command lights from a phone or tablet with a mobile app. With these systems, the customer can manage the landscape lighting system from anywhere in the home, indoors or outdoors and can set timing functions as well as directly switch the lights on or off.