

LIGHT UP YOUR NIGHT

Landscape Lighting Design with LEDs

| WRITTEN BY TANEK HOOD



Landscape lighting provides subtle entry lighting to a minimally lit dock pier extending into the cove at Hillyer Residence, Harvey Cedars, NJ. Copyright: Tanek Hood - Reynoldslandscaping.com

“A light-emitting diode (LED) is a two-lead semiconductor light source. When a suitable voltage is applied to the leads, electrons are able to recombine with electron holes within the device, releasing energy in the form of photons. This effect is called electroluminescence, and the color of the light (corresponding to the energy of the photon) is determined by the energy band gap of the semiconductor.” (Wikipedia)

LED HEAT

Let's start by talking about the color temperature of LEDs in landscape lighting. The lower the Kelvin (K), the warmer the color of light from the LED lamp. Industry standard is 3,000 K for landscape lighting. The warmest lamp I would specify for landscape design or an outdoor living area is 2,700 K. The higher the Kelvin (K), the cooler the color of light in an LED lamp. The coolest color lamp that I would specify would be 4,000 K, which enhances something like a blue spruce (*Piceapungens*) or silverberry (*Elaeagnus*). Those species have features that come alive with a cooler light color.

These options were not available with halogen landscape lighting. A new trend available only with the subtle nuances of LEDs is the creation of depth and direction by shaping the layers in the gardens with a tapering of warmer and cooler color temperatures. Tapering from cooler to warmer LED lighting can visually direct clients to certain areas of interest on site, such as a distant footbridge or the front door.

KEEPING IT SIMPLE

Less is more in most things in life, and that also applies to outdoor lighting. There is a great effect that can be achieved with subtle nuances of LED in beam spread, color temperature, and watts. LED lamps are more accurately measured by lumens and CRI, but watts is still considered an acceptable form of measurement. Wattages ranging from 1.5 to 9 watts are becoming more efficient with each year and generation of lamp. The A-style halogen lamp of yesterday is almost gone due solely to its inefficiency.

STAYING ON THE PATH

Path lights are a necessity on some sites on LBI for highlighting a walkway for safety. Although the fixture is not visually appealing to look at during the day, they are often the only way to highlight a walkway. The lighting also has a non-natural feel due to the "runway" effect, yet is sometimes the only option available given the layout of the walkways and gardens. LED path lights have an advantage as they do not burn out for an extended period of time. Although manufacturers provide a five-year warranty on any quality LED lamp, the projected LED lamp life is 50,000 hours, or approximately 20 years. Because of these advancements, our designs never have a burned-out lamp—always visible (and troubling!) in a linear line of light.



Crape Myrtle tree canopies lit with warm LED up lights. Path light fixtures highlight the travertine walkway and patio. Miller Residence, Haven Beach, NJ. Copyright: JohnMartinelliPhotography.com



Landscape lighting design with directional up lighting and walkway lighting creates an inviting space for at the Planigan Residence, Harvey Cedars, NJ. Copyright: Tanek Hood - Reynoldslandscaping.com



Landscape and architectural lighting cohesively blended together with a basic lighting control system at the Miller Residence, Haven Beach, NJ. Copyright: Tanek Hood - Reynoldslandscaping.com

Fiberglass piling cap dock pier lighting at the Hillyer Residence, Harvey Cedars, NJ, with Bible Conference Center in the background. Copyright: Tanek Hood - Reynoldslandscaping.com



SHADOWS & LIGHT

Our clients have benefitted from the way we use shadows to hide less important areas of a site. By positioning fixtures to create dark areas (shadows) in the layout, the lighting design highlights the areas of interest. Leaving areas dark is a common lighting tool for hiding utilities or an unsightly garage or shed.

Shadow grazing and wash lighting are techniques that create a changing visual interest with moving shadows in the garden. LED wash lights have a smooth light output without hard edges or visual distortion. This technique makes the garden feel alive, highlighting grasses back-dropped along walls, windmills, wind chimes, and artwork.

USING YOUR HEIGHT

Down lighting from trees or structures in cooler-color LED temperature (3,200 K to 4,000 K) creates an organic light

source, often called moonlighting. Slight changes in color temperature are the biggest benefit of LEDs, because the ability to subtly change the color of the light produces a directional focus onto a seating area or sculpture, as if the moon was softly shining through the trees.

In addition to supplying light for the task at hand, directional task lighting can also be a key piece of your lighting design—a switched down light for your BBQ grill and food prep area or, if on the bay, a directional down light for a fish-cleaning station. Another great example would be dock or pier lighting, which is functional, yet beautiful.

Each client needs or prefers a different amount of light in different areas of their site. For example, as we age, our eyes need more light to see everything. Another benefit, and good example, is how easily we can double wattage of the LED from three to six watts for walkway or task lighting; with a halogen system, it would be difficult or impossible.



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INSIDE OUT

A view of your landscape lighting from inside the home is often more important than the view while outside. Even at my home, the added depth of seeing the landscape lighting through my windows provides an amazing perspective of the expanse of space and increased sense of feeling safe. Landscape and architectural lighting enables you to view a site in a different, more beautiful way at night. What is the point if you, the homeowner, cannot enjoy the benefits of quality lighting from inside?

ALIGNED & FOCUSED WITH TIME

Many homeowners and contractors think that maintenance is not necessary with LED landscape lighting. Ongoing maintenance and night aiming are important requirements of owning a lighting system. Since it is an important aspect of your home, someone should maintain your outdoor lighting system's design integrity and fixture quality with the same level of care and maintenance you have for your vehicle.

PICKING YOUR PRO

For the homeowner considering landscape lighting, it is always good to choose a lighting design professional who is passionate about lighting, is licensed/insured, offers a comprehensive lighting design, and includes night adjustments in their design. Each client should ask to drive by a few lighting sites at night and during the day, as well as view a variety of lighting photographs designed or installed by that professional. Night aiming and detailed lighting designs are some of the important components a professional will bring to the lighting table.

Seasonal container planters with camouflaged wash lights create a focal reference point along with a safety barrier along the bulkhead at the Miller Residence, Haven Beach, NJ. Copyright: JohnMartinelliPhotography.com