

Lights On For Xmas

At least once a year the average householder has a chance to express his individuality and decorative skill for the world to see and, perchance, to admire. He decides to decorate the outside of his house for Christmas . . . or enters a community Christmas lighting contest.

Anyone faced with the challenge of lighting the exterior of a home this year, and feeling a bit unsure about where to start, need have no cause for despair. Lighting specialists have some simple guides to help plan and analyze a display.

Surveying the house and grounds, it is a general rule that four main areas require decoration: The tree, windows, doors and general exterior (roof, lawn, shrubs). Take them one at a time.

The tree

To outline a tree, one light per square foot is required. To determine exactly how many lights a tree requires, multiply its height by its width (measure at bottom of tree) by 1½. For example, if a tree is 6 feet by 4 feet, it needs 6 x 4 x 1½ = 36 lights to outline it properly.

To achieve solid, mass lighting, double that number. Precautions should be taken not to exceed this figure. More than 72 lights on a 6' x 4' tree would make it gaudy.

The Tree

Not all Christmas trees are perfectly symmetrical cones. Some are short and squat; others are downright skinny. But their shortcomings can be disguised with a little lighting "know-how".

If a tree is short and stocky, hang strings of lights from the top in straight vertical lines. This makes the tree look taller. Good for all trees that aren't symmetrical, too. If a tree is thin, spiral two sets of strings, one running from left to right, the other from right to left. The result is a cross-hatch that gives a tree body. When a tree is tall and symmetrical, emphasize its line by hanging lights horizontally in a series of even loops or drapes.

Some tips: A tree purchased well before Christmas should have the bark removed from the bottom and be kept in a bucket of water. This reduces the fire hazard, and Mom won't have to spend her time picking off needles. When decorating the tree work from the top down, never from the bottom up.

Windows

In decorating a window, its architectural design should be kept in mind, as well as the overall lighting treatment planned for the rest of the exterior and the decorations visible through the window. A large picture window at the front of the house can be a natural frame for an indoor Christmas tree. The obvious — and best — lighting decoration is simply to outline the window with strings of light.

No interior tree visible through the window? Drape strings from a lighted star at the top center, down to the lower corners. Such a design makes a "framing" pattern for lighted candles or wreaths inside the window. If a window is regulation size, two strings of lights with a star at their apex form a pleasing frame for a lighted wreath, tying the entire window decoration into one unit. Extend the lights to the outer edge of the shutters for a wider lighting pattern.

In the case of a two-storey home, interest and sparkle can be added by filling second-storey window boxes with "lighted flowers" and boughs of greens. To make the flowers, lighting specialists suggest fastening petal-like reflectors and placing them behind colored bulbs to give a more realistic effect.

Either 25-watt or 10-watt bulbs can be used in outdoor sockets. Prop the bulbs in position with wire. Complete the boxes with feathery sprays of Scotch pine.

Garage doors often present a decorating problem. If a garage adjoins the house or is located near enough to be part of the decorating theme, it can provide a perfect background for a cut-out figure of a jolly Santa. Hide a 150-watt outdoor spotlight in a nearby tree, experts advise, and aim it on St. Nick.

General Exterior

The house and lawn — there's where an amateur decorator can really let himself go. Whether it's a stealthy Santa climbing down the chimney or a smiling snowman guarding the doorway, they can provide just the right highlight for an outdoor display.

Illuminated pieces made of plastic, metal or glass, are available in the stores and range from ornaments a few inches high to lighted figures several feet tall for use in the yard or for mounting on the sides or roof of the house. Use flood and spot lamps to emphasize them.

Doors

Since Christmas is traditionally a time for getting together, the question of making doorways places of glowing welcome should be considered. A simple but professional result can be achieved with new strip lighting and household aluminum foil. Crush long strips of foil to cover the door frame and staple in place. Strips of colored lights can be tacked on to this "foil frame." The front door itself can be decorated with jolly snowmen cut from wrapping paper. For background, pine branches and white-tipped cones tied with red ribbons to the inner front door may be used.

Another idea. Compliment friends on their choice of Christmas cards by using them as part of a festive holiday doorway. Tack them helter-skelter to a door and "wrap" the door itself as a gift package with wide plastic or oil-cloth streamers to which a large bow is stapled. Finish off with a 150-watt projector spotlight in an outdoor-type holder placed several feet away to focus attention on the arrangement.

But the lamps should be concealed so that only the beam is visible from the street.

Outlining the pleasing architectural lines of a home with string lighting is another suggestion. For greater effectiveness, lay three separate strings of outdoor lights on the ground and stagger them so that sockets and bulbs are about six inches — rather than the usual 18 inches — apart. Tape them together with weatherproof electrical tape. If planning to use them in the same location next year, hang the strings from permanent screw eyes or hooks. Tape wire to prevent rubbing against hooks, which should be close enough together to keep wires from hitting the house.

An upstairs porch can become the high point in outdoor decorations. Try placing a masonite or commercial wallboard cut-out figure of Santa on a ladder securely anchored to the roof. A 150-watt

PAR spotlight will highlight the arrangement. If a home has an outside area unbroken by windows, take advantage of it! Use one of the commercial "Santa with sleigh and reindeer" cut-out now on the market. Silhouette — and enlarge — it with a 150-watt projector floodlight.

Symmetrical shrubs or graceful bushes planted close together, or in hedgerows, may be effectively decorated with joined string sets strung horizontally. Trees and bushes growing separately look best when decorated individually.

One note of caution: While taking part in the gayest season of the year, the home-owner should remember that he is dealing with an unknown — electricity.

Christmas tree electric lighting equipment bears a Canadian Standards Association label marked for indoor and outdoor use. Be sure not to use a set labelled for indoors when decorating outside a home. Follow wiring instructions carefully to prevent the possible overloading of circuits. Inspect all cords, as well as other holiday lighting equipment, before each season's use. Repair or replace if damaged — for safety's sake!

Is Christmas Oldest Of Xmas Festivals?

This most widely-observed holiday of modern times is not the oldest of Christian festivals. The keeping of Epiphany preceded observance of Christmas. December 25 was made a church feast about 336 A.D.

Various historians have set the time of the actual birth of Jesus, to dates corresponding to our present January 6, March 25, May 20, April 19 or 20, November 17, etc. Christmas has been celebrated on more than one hundred different days of the year.

Adoption of December 25 was favored in the early church because it corresponded to the Roman Saturnalia or celebration of the winter solstice. Its establishment assisted in conversion of the observance of the pagan festival into a Christian occasion.

Pope Gregory I, surnamed the Great, enjoined missionaries not to destroy such pagan customs as were innocent and could be woven into the fabric of Christian ceremony. All the festivities of the winter solstice were absorbed in the observance of Christmas Day in the course of time. The Romans practised exchanging gifts at the Saturnalia. Pagans decked their halls with evergreens, holly and mistletoe in Druid times. These green plants were naturally regarded with awe in an otherwise bare winter season.

Egyptian Pioneers Study Time

The Egyptians were probably the first to develop any "exact" method of calculating time—about 4,000 B. C. they devised a "calendar."

The Christian era begins on January 1, in the middle of the fourth

753rd year of the building of Rome and in the 4714th year of the Julian period.


The Jewish calendar reads 5717 in relation to 1956 A.D., since according to Jewish dogma and tradition the Creation antedated the birth of Christ approximately 3,761 years. The Jewish calendar was adopted during the 15th century.

Use of the notation A.D. (year of our Lord) was inaugurated in 879 by Charles III of Germany.



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