

# Solar-powered garden lights efficient, convenient

## But they're not suitable for high, intense lighting

By ERIN SCULLION

OTTAWA — Outdoor solar lighting for urban and rural properties is getting brighter. Think about it. No muss. No fuss. No wiring, no plugs, no transformers, no digging, no electrician, no light bulbs to replace or throw out. None of what you'd have with conventional outdoor electrical lighting.

And even the big box stores — think Home Depot, Sears, Zellers — are getting into the gig. Cruise the lighting aisle of these stores and you'll find various makes and models of "solar accent lighting."

"Solar outdoor lighting is definitely starting to go mainstream," says Sean Twomey, co-owner of Arbour Environmental Shoppe in Ottawa.

A 12-piece low voltage garden light set can run you as little as \$30, but you'll do well to find one solar light for the same price.

"Our outdoor solar lighting products don't fly out of here because they are more expensive [than conventional low voltage electrical systems]," says Twomey. "But in certain applications, they're great and you can't beat them."

Installing solar accent lighting is simple. You stick a stake into the ground and attach an attractive lantern. Want to relocate them? No problem, just pick them up and stick them somewhere else.

There's no monthly charge to run them either.

"I got a set of outside low voltage lights for Father's Day one year," says

Home Depot sales associate Ian McLaughlin, "but as soon as they're done in, I'm definitely going with solar lights."

Don't forget, though, solar lights need a certain level of direct daily sunlight to charge their batteries. How much light they'll give off, and for how long, will depend on how much sun or cloud cover they get. If it's a shady area you need lighted, solar lights aren't going to cut it.

"Consumers need to have realistic expectations," says Twomey. "Outdoor solar lights work well for accent lighting."

Chuck Gobeil of Renewable Energy of Plum Hollow in Kingston, Ont. agrees.

"You're not going to get high, intense lighting with outdoor garden solar lights," he says. "They're great because they're wireless, trouble-free, and come on and go off automatically."

Gobeil says that outdoor solar lighting products are more durable than they used to be. He recommends consumers look for solar lights labeled LED (Light Emitting Diodes). LED lighting produces the same light as an incandescent (filament) bulb of the same rating using only one-tenth the power consumption. LED lights are much more durable, expected to provide 100,000 hours of light.

Consumers should be careful about any product they buy, though. Garden lights should be clearly marked and properly designed for exterior use. As with any product, don't forget to check the warranty.

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