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It's been said that you can't always get what you want, but that you get what you need.

With a little planning, knowledge of what solar lights are available, and simple maintenance, solar lights will give you both what you want and what you need.

No matter what type of product, from cars to solar accent lights, wise buying decisions, proper use and a little use maintenance means you'll get the most out of what you buy.

While it's true that placing solar lights is pretty simple and they are low-maintenance, there are things to do to make sure you get what you want from them.

Like many evolving technologies, solar lighting is definitely one where you get what you pay for in terms of appearance, reliability, product lifespan, and light quality.

But, you need to understand the different types of solar lights that are available. For example, the illumination from an accent solar light is far different from light emitted from solar lamps, spotlights or floodlights.

Figure Out What You Want and Need

Whether you're adding some solar lights to your property for accent purposes or safety, you'll want to determine the style of and quantity of fixtures you need.

Think about the function or purpose the solar light will serve. It's often helpful to draw a rough outline of your property, noting where existing lights are and where new illumination is necessary.

It doesn't have to be fancy, just make sure you note things like decks, paths, stairs, patios, walkways, shrubbery and garden beds. The diagram should include things that cast shadows for large portions of the day such as fences, houses, or trees.

On your plan, pencil in strong existing light sources, such as street lights, as solar lights only turn on only when they detect darkness. If you put solar accent lights, for example, in an area that is already lit by another stronger source, odds are they won't turn on at night.

Think about what things you want to highlight, where you want solar lights to illuminate walkways, steps or stairs or areas where you need additional light for safety, or secluded areas without electricity that you want lighting for security purposes. A good trick you may find helpful is to walk around your home in the early evening and use a flash light to see how positioning the light in different ways produces different results.
This can help you plan the location and types of solar lighting fixtures you need, especially if you want lots of lights or if you’re buying or building a new residence. And, more and more, people are choosing to get rid of their conventional electric lights and use solar lighting as fixtures age, to lower use their electricity bills, and to help the environment.

Read and Save Instructions that Come with New Solar Lights

Yes, it usually looks simple, but assembling solar lights in a rush or incorrectly may break them and void the warranty. Taking a few minutes to review the instructions when you first open the package will save you time in the long run.

Carefully read the instruction before assembling or installing solar fixtures. You should also save the directions for down the road in two years or so when the rechargeable batteries will probably need replacement.

Charge Solar Fixtures in the Sun for 2 Days before Use

Solar lights should be charged in sun for 2 days before use.

So, if you get your lights on a Saturday and put them in the sun on Sunday and take them inside or shut them off on Sunday night. Leave them "on" or outside on Monday and by Monday night they'll be good to go without undue strain on the batteries.

Can you get away with less of an initial charge for the fixture and its batteries? Yes, but you're causing unnecessary strain on the batteries that may lessen their effectiveness down the road or shorten the two-year life cycle of most rechargeable batteries used in solar lights.

Mount Solar Panels in Sunny Places

Seems obvious, but you'd be surprised what people think could work.

Solar panels need to be placed where they will receive the maximum sunlight throughout the day. Shadows cast by houses, trees and other structures move and lengthen during the day. Six hours of sunlight generally is enough for a "full-charge."

Too much shade and your solar light will be less efficient or not work at all. A properly positioned panel often means satisfaction or disappointment about how your solar lights perform. And, the fewer obstructions between the sun and your solar panel, the better your solar lights will perform.

Even "amorphous solar panels," those that work during cloudy or rainy days, need to be placed in an area with some sunshine.

Does this mean that if your property has a lot of shade solar lights won't work for you? No, because many solar lights have cords between the solar panel and the lighting fixture itself.

If you want to put solar accent lights in a shady area, there are newer models of solar fixtures that you place the light in a shady area and the solar panel in a nearby area of sun. This has long been
standard for solar floodlights, spotlights and shed lights, but recently is being designed into newer solar accent and accent spotlights.

Cords between the solar panel and lighting fixture are usually standard for solar spotlights, floodlights and shed lights that can light the inside of outdoor structures such as sheds, barns, carports, porches, or greenhouses.

Solar water pumps, solar fountains and combination solar bird baths/water fountains usually come with cables between the solar fixture and the solar panel to give you flexibility. It should be noted that most solar fountains require steady sunshine, because there is no "idle time" for the battery to store power.

Solar pumps such as those for ponds, waterfalls or other outdoor water features you wish to create or enhance aren't as dependent on strong sun as stand-alone fountains, because they usually have larger solar panels and larger, stronger batteries. Because most water pumps also come cords between the fixture and the solar panel, this hardware can be hidden or located several feet from the pump.

Quick Trouble-Shooting/Easy Fixes

If your solar lighting fixture does not come on at dusk and you have followed the above tips, try the following:

Make sure that the solar lights are not impacted by another light source (such as a bright electric street light), as solar lights have a sensor that makes them light up on at dusk.
Check that the solar panel is not in the shade for a large portion of the day. Even "amorphous" solar panels that work on cloudy or rainy days need sun now and again.
Make sure the solar lights' switches are in the "ON" position, if they have one.
Double-check that the batteries are installed correctly. This is easiest to do by double-checking the instructions that came with your solar lighting product. If they're the correct batteries and installed properly, they may need to be replaced.

Seasonal Tips for Spring and Fall

In the spring and fall, make sure that solar panels are clear of falling leaves or other blowing debris.

You should also take care when raking or leaf blowers do not damage any solar lights or solar panels. Many people take solar accent lights in during fall clean-up and place them back outside during the spring, especially if they hire other people to do yard work.

When pollen counts are high, you'll want to occasionally clean the solar panels so that they are a thick layer of pollen doesn't impeded the solar panels ability to absorb the sun's energy. If you live in an area that has a lot of dust, you'll want to watch for dust build-up as well.

In the spring, it's a good idea to check-out of solar lights, both the ones taken in during the winter and those that stay out year-round. And if you do store fixture, make sure that you remove the
batteries and carefully mark which batteries go with what fixtures.

For fixtures that stay out year-round (spotlights, floodlights or solar lamps), spring’s a good time to make sure the batteries work, and to check the fixture for any damage caused by ice or hail, such as minor crack.

If you see any damage and the lights still work, you can minimize any potential damage by using clear caulk to cover any cracks. After you change batteries, you may also want to put some clear caulk over the areas that were separated when the batteries were removed. While it's unlikely changing the batter properly would allow moisture into high quality fixtures, the caulk can offer some reassurance.

Spring is also a good time to clean solar panels with a cloth or cotton ball dampened with alcohol or vinegar. Glass and plastic panes for solar lights can be cleaned with any glass cleaner. It also helps to use a VERY small amount of oil on any metal fixtures, just make sure the oil doesn't get on the solar panels, the fixture's panes, or any plastic parts. Most non-vegetable based oils can damage plastic or rubber materials.

Tips for the Winter

As much as you can, keep snow and ice off of solar panels. If solar lights or solar panels get buried, charge them in strong sun for at least 6 hours before using them again to get maximum performance with least wear and tear on the solar components.

Snow plows, shovels and snow blowers also can damage solar fixtures and panels. Because you (or whoever clears the snow) can't see them, it's easy to do. If you leave solar lights out year-round and know a storm is coming, you might want to take a stick and mark where the lights are to avoid damage.

All solar fountains, pumps and other water feature should be taken inside during subfreezing temperatures to protect against damage caused as the freezing water expands. This is true of all water features, not just those powered by solar.

Try and You'll Get What You Need

When you plan your lighting and buy the proper solar lights to meet your needs, take care when assembling them, and taking a little time for maintenance throughout the year, you'll get top performance from them year-round.

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best for their needs, maintenance tips and new solar lighting technology.

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