

Low Voltage Lighting

When temperatures drop and trimming, fertilizing, and even planting should wait until the danger of hard freeze is past, our thoughts can shift to other aspects of our landscaping. In this case, I am referring to low voltage lighting.

Yes, I can hear the groans now coming from those of you who support dark sky ordinances. Fear not, I too support ordinances that control light pollution. (Yes, Virginia, there is such a thing as light pollution.) We, as a society, have managed to isolate ourselves from many things “natural” and this includes the magnificent vista that is the starry sky on a moonless night. I count myself very fortunate to live in a rural area such as Gold Canyon, where limitations have been placed on the sources of aforementioned light pollution.

However, when done correctly, low voltage lighting can improve security, set the “mood,” and extend the hours that our gardens can be used for relaxing and entertaining. Lighting can be used not only to highlight features in the yard, such as fountains and statues, but an otherwise nondescript saguaro or ironwood tree can turn into a central, striking feature of the landscape. This can all be done without impacting the night skies.

The key is the flexibility of new technology. Some of the new halogen bulbs can produce as little as .05 foot candles at a distance of 6 feet (the full moon produces .1 foot candles.) Of course, how you set up your lights can make a great deal of difference also. While most H.O.A.s allow 12-volt lighting systems, many are very specific as to how the lights are shielded and aimed.

For me, the single largest benefit of low voltage lighting is to extend the outdoor living hours past dark. With timers and photo electric cells that are a part of most systems, a dinner party does not have to move indoors when the sun goes down. Low voltage lighting adds a dramatic dimension to the landscape, without competing with our need to view those beautiful, starry skies.