



A CLEAN GETAWAY EXTERNAL LIGHTING

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Robert Webber reveals his autumn maintenance checklist for getting the most out of external lighting

October: the month that the clocks go back and the leaves fall. The darker evenings make us even more reliant upon the lighting we have enjoyed throughout the summer months. We have a whole ream of clients who ask us to maintain their lighting twice a year. March is our spring visit and October is the autumn visit.

Think about what an external light goes through in a year: frozen to near death in winter, baked by the sun in summer, submersed by floods during the April showers and then

covered by leaves in autumn.

Regular maintenance is essential. We follow a five step schedule for all of our systems and clients.



“MAINTAIN TO ENJOY”



As with maintenance of any electrical item, always turn it off first. Make it easy for yourself by ensuring that you can find all the lights; bringing them out from under dense foliage towards a clearer area will always help.

☑ The first check is a visual inspection. Look over the light and check for any visible signs of damage. Check any knuckle joints, lenses and cable entries, securing screws or spikes.

☑ Next you must give the fitting a good wash and wipe. We use standard hot soapy water and a roll of rag, similar to car valeting. Make sure it's clean and dry before you even attempt to undo the light fitting itself.

Most lights can be simply unscrewed from the top. Alternatively, you may find three or four bolts holding the top to the body. Use the correct screwdriver for the job. If you mess up the head of the bolt then the light is as good as rubbish – you'll never be able to get into it again.

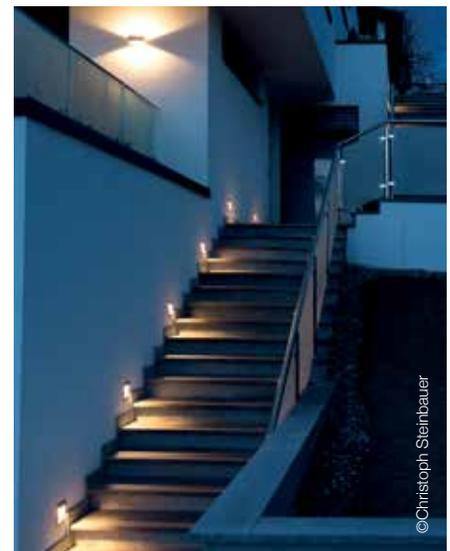
☑ Always take the seal out and check for damage. Most lights will have a seal between the body and top and most manufacturers can supply new seals, but you normally wouldn't need to change it. We simply clean the seal gently, lay aside to dry and then smear a small amount of Vaseline onto it to give it a bit more volume and take up any pit marks.

☑ The next obvious place to go is the lamp. It's not a bulb – bulbs grow underground. Lamps do have a certain life span, regardless of whether they still work or not. The amount of light output that you see (lumens) degrades over the life of the lamp. Remember to check its colour, temperature, wattage and

beam angle. If it's all okay then simply clean the lamp and set aside.

☑ Finally, check the lamp holder. In most garden lights, this will be a low voltage holder where the two prongs of the lamp push into. It's not uncommon for these to be slightly blackened or tarnished. If it needs changing, call an expert. Otherwise, a simple clean with a dry rag will do.

If your clients follow these steps twice a year they'll be sure to extend the life of their light fittings. If they wait until they need us, often it's been so long since the light was serviced that we physically won't be able to get into it. This is a very common occurrence. Maintain to enjoy.



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ABOUT ROBERT WEBBER

Robert Webber is the founder of Scenic Lighting, a specialist exterior lighting company based in Berkshire. He designs and installs garden lighting throughout the UK and internationally. Robert can be contacted on rob@sceniclighting.com or via his mobile on 07766 051 000. www.sceniclighting.com