



Robert Webber advises on mitigating the effects of the 'eternal summer' that artificial lighting can create in our gardens

As I write I've just returned from my daily routine of walking my two dogs at first light. I'm fortunate enough to live in a beautiful part of West Berkshire, just near the Lambourn Valley. It's particularly stunning at this time of year, with the sights and sounds of wildlife at every turn.

Often this wildlife can be a pest when it comes to gardens. Eating plants, disturbing newly turned soil, and specifically when it comes to our lighting cables. It's a weekly battle to keep the cables safe and the lighting intact.

Scientific evidence suggests that artificial light can have a negative effect on animals, especially nocturnal ones. Introducing badly designed garden lighting can radically alter their environment by turning night into day. So what can we do to limit these effects? In many ways we are just custodians of their outside spaces. We enjoy using them, making them pretty, lighting them, planting them and changing them. Whereas their habitat is essential for the continuation of the cyclical nature of procreation and hunting.

When I am offering a lighting design, or



carrying out an installation, I always try to remember who is going to use the garden the most. Often it's not my client, or the designer, but the wildlife hidden within the garden. I know this is more prevalent in rural areas, but cities have the same challenges, even if it's just limiting light pollution from your garden to neighbouring properties. Tree lighting tends to be the main culprit for wildlife disturbances. It's an area I love – highlighting trees in different ways from the ground as well as moonlighting or silhouette lighting from above. I've covered these effects in previous articles. But when shining light up into a canopy we need to be considerate to

nesting birds. It's a known fact that migrating birds navigate by moonlight and the stars. Artificial light can cause them to wander off course and towards dangerous night-time city landscapes, or to migrate too early and miss critical conditions at their destinations for nesting and foraging.

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I'm not your typical veggie eco warrior, but like most of us in the landscaping industry, I do care about the environments we seek to create, both for our clients and the wildlife that surrounds us. A considerate lighting design should always take these elements into account.

ROB'S TOP TIPS

1 UV light attracts wildlife. LEDs emit hardly any UV light, so always specify and fit LED lamps. There are some great retro fit LED lamps available now that can be fitted in existing external fittings. This keeps external light colour the same.

2 When lighting trees from the ground, think about using effects that leave certain areas of the tree canopy dark. This will facilitate nesting birds. Remember – don't light every tree you see. Have one or two key features and then the contrasts between night and day will help create the magic.

3 If budget allows then use a lighting system that can change light levels. You can set scenes that allow for some areas to be darker at different times. Then when you are in the garden they can adjust to light the areas you require.

4 Specify brighter or feature lighting on different circuits. That way rather than have everything on after dark, you have options of functional, aesthetic and feature lighting, dependent upon how the garden is used.

5 Always employ the services of a specialist lighting company. We have been lighting landscapes for nearly 20 years, so we understand the careful balances of both client enjoyment and natural influences.

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 051000.

www.sceniclighting.com