



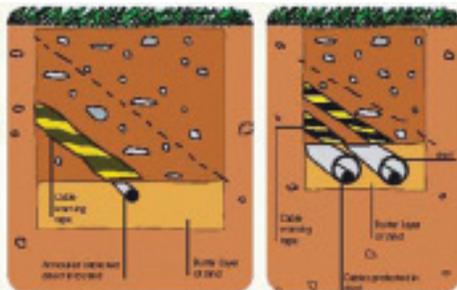
Robert Webber tackles the issue of burying conduits and digging trenches for cable. Cutting corners is not advised...

At least once a week we receive a call that goes like this: “Rob, where are you working? I’m digging out and I’ve gone through a cable!” “Oh dear,” is my reply. “Yep, it was only two inches under the lawn!” they exclaim. Between us we make a plan and get the problem solved.

We work with some great landscapers who methodically plan trenches and digs as part of their works. When we collaborate with a new company, we always sit down and talk about the best way to work together for all concerned.

How low can you go?

Burying conduits and trenching while machines are onsite is always my conversation starter for ten. “How deep?” is what I’m usually asked in reply. Well, believe it or not, there are no laws as to the depth a cable should be installed in a residential garden. The IEE Regs, our bible, only has recommendations. It is a non-statutory document, which means it’s advice, not law. However, this is the document that’s called on in a court of law to prove competency and best



TRENCH TOWN ROCK UNWRAPPING CABLE DEPTHS

practice. The only regulations regarding depths concern public service street lighting. Lampposts, to you and me.

Reg 522.8.10 states that cables should be installed at ‘sufficient depth’ to avoid being damaged by ‘reasonable foreseeable disturbance’ of the ground. Not very helpful when you have installers cutting corners on depth and cable run routes. But that’s what happens in a price-driven world. They’re cheaper for a reason!

We follow a general rule of 600mm depth on mains voltage cables, regardless of whether they are in conduit or not. The trench is then backfilled with sand and a warning tape is applied, so that any reasonable excavation would be halted.

We tend to bury low voltage cabling at approximately 300mm, a good spade’s depth. That’s normally in a flowerbed, where digging is more regular and often done by the client or gardener. We use SY cable in flowerbeds – a braided flex that offers far more mechanical protection than a standard outdoor flex. Since using this, the incidence of damaged cables has been close to zero.

Don’t forget to double up

Landscapers should, wherever possible, tackle the issue of conduits in a garden at the dig out stage. It’s not expensive. 50m of 50mm double walled electrical conduit will set you back about £100 or so. It’s a great selling point for your

expertise and future proofing a garden. Add it to the specification for costing. You dig it?

Don’t forget – use double walled conduit. It’s smooth on the inside so it’s easy for a cable to



glide through. Bury them 300mm deep in open soil and 600mm deep everywhere else. Always use warning tape. It’s £30 for 300m. Plan ‘from the feet up’ so cables and conduits go in at the right time and no compromises are necessary.

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.

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