



Twinkle, Twinkle

This month our expert spreads the holiday spirit with tips about festive vegetation illumination.

Q: "Randall, the HGTV site mentions installing "twinkle lights" along the trunks and branches of trees but doesn't explain the recommended best pattern of installation. I have redesigned the front of our warehouse building, which serves as a very busy community theater, to include commercial string lights installed in five trees. There must be a way to make sense of how to weave three sets of 50-foot lights while joining them only once for power. Do you know that secret?"



Twinkle lights help trees look great even when they lose their foliage.

A: I'm always happy to get a question that relates to an upcoming holiday. First, you need to look at the amount of power you will be consuming. Having a dedicated circuit for the exterior lights is a good idea. You don't want the circuit to be shared by other power-consuming items, such as a microwave oven or hair dryer, where a sudden power surge could trip the breaker.

There are a good number of LED (light-emitting diode) holiday lights now available. They have a very long life and consume less power, which translates into lower maintenance costs and lower utility bills. California's Pacific Gas & Electric has a chart that shows a cost comparison between standard holiday lights and LEDs; go to www.pge.com/res/holiday_lighting.html to see the surprising results.

Also, my recommendation would be to find a commercial electrical contracting outfit in your area that can do the installation for you. They would be the same ones that do the holiday lights for stores. I suspect that a few calls to firms, listed in the yellow pages, will uncover a potential company for the job. They would also have access to such pieces of machinery as a "cherry picker" to help get the lights into the uppermost branches of the trees.

To achieve an even appearance for the spacing of the individual lights, there is a product you should look at called "net lights." They are made to wrap around the trunks of trees or to drape over canopies of foliage. Take a look at www.christmaslightsetc.com/net-lights.htm to see an example of one manufacturer who makes net lights. They are easy to install and create a uniform look for both commercial and residential applications. They even look great wrapped around family members who have passed out on the sofa. Remember, an embarrassing digital picture is worth its weight in gold when you need a favor or a little extra spending money.

Wattage Watch

Some dimmers have a reduced capacity when banked together in a wall box. This is called de-rating.

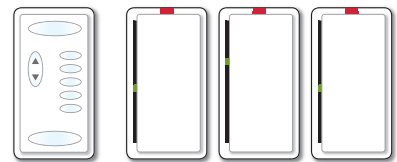


Photo by Dennis Anderson

GOT A QUESTION FOR RANDALL?

'Tis almost the season.

Send questions to:
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