

Exterior Lighting Ideas for your Patio or Balcony



If you go through the process of decorating your outdoor living space to make it more inviting and comfortable for the warmer weather, consider taking the added initiative of creating a unique ambient environment with complementary LED lighting. Not only are the new lighting systems energy efficient, they are also extremely versatile, offering you an inspiring range of possibilities in a dazzling array of colours. From subtle pathway lights to strategic spotlights and energy-efficient floodlights, there's no better way to wake up your garden, patio or balcony at nightfall.

Check Your A-C's Exterior Unit for Optimum Performance

Before the height of summer arrives, check your central air-conditioning's exterior unit to ensure it is ready to provide you with maximum cooling while using the least possible amount of energy. First, confirm that the power is off. Then, check that the box sits level, and remove any objects or plants that may restrict its expulsion of interior heat. Remove the outside screen(s) and clean the fan, compressor, condenser coils and fins with a low-pressure garden hose. Before replacing the screen(s), check that the fan is unencumbered, and that the aluminum fins are not bent. If necessary, you can gently straighten them with a butter



knife or A-C fin comb. Next, go inside to replace your interior air filter(s), which can be accessed near the main fan. If filters are washable, clean them at least twice a year. Turn the power back on and set your thermostat to trigger the A-C operation. If anything is amiss, call for service now, to avoid the rush during the next heat wave. Be sure to ask your technician for a written inspection checklist.

Real Estate Can Enable Retirement Decisions

As baby-boomers advance into their retirement years, many will face decisions about their living arrangements, such as whether to retrofit their current home to address mobility issues, or downsize to embrace a less demanding lifestyle. Whatever the expectations, it's wise to plan ahead and budget for the future, when issues like health, self-sufficiency and social interaction may take on new or more critical importance. If you're a long-term homeowner, you'll have likely built up equity in your real estate investment, which puts you in a more favourable position to free up funds to meet your goals. So, whether you're planning extensive renovations or extended vacations, it's wise to determine your home's current market value compared



to the cost of your long term plans in order to determine your financial leverage. Since real estate is an investment that can be liquidated relatively quickly, you might also consider selling or refinancing to release funds to address not only your future lifestyle needs and preferences, but also personal desires to donate to charities or plan for family inheritances.

New Windows Are a True Home Improvement

It's easy to think of your home's windows as being visual enablers that merely allow daylight to come in, and you to look out. However, in addition to that function, windows also need to perform, almost as well as walls do, in their role as barriers that protect you from the outside environment. As a homeowner, if you neglect this critical factor, you may be compromising the comfort and energy efficiency of your home. By paying attention to the condition of your windows' frames, panes, closure seals and lock mechanisms, you can determine whether they are underperforming. Look for condensation "fog" on or within the glass, as well as loose or rattling sashes and sliders, and dried-out or cracked caulking or weather-stripping around the glass and frame. If you are uncertain, consult a reputable company for an energy leak assessment, then get quotes for windows that are certified for their performance and longevity, and installed with a guarantee. If you decide to buy new



windows, consider a design that complements your home's architecture, as their style can contribute to your home's resale value, just as their energy efficiency can.