



Tried & tested solar lights

GN consumer expert **Geoff Hodge** looks at post and path solar lights

SOLAR-powered lights are a great alternative to mains electricity and even low-voltage garden lights. There's no need to wire them in, they can be moved around the garden with ease, and there are no running costs or a risk of getting electrocuted!

Years ago, when I used to manage garden centres, it was almost embarrassing to sell most solar-powered lights. They were awful and hardly worked at all. You were lucky if you got a meagre orange glow for an hour! But now the technology has improved. Solar panels are more efficient, the storage batteries are much better and LED lights provide far better light output.

The solar panel absorbs the light and the energy is stored in

rechargeable batteries. All the lights I tested come with rechargeable batteries that can be replaced when you need to. Most are supplied with either AA or AAA nickel-metal hydride (Ni-MH) batteries, but two come with more versatile lithium-ion batteries.

The larger the rating of the battery, the more power it can store and use. The electric charge is measured in milliampere-hours (mAh) - the more mAh, the longer the batteries will work for before they need recharging.

Modern solar panels need to be positioned in an open area where they receive good overall daylight. They don't need to receive strong sunlight: a blessing this year!

The lights automatically come

on at dusk or when light levels are low, and go off again at dawn or when light levels improve.

All the lights tested come with a spike, so they can be inserted into soil or into the lawn.

The test

I set up the lights in an open area of my garden to ensure the solar panels had free access to overall light. I kept them running for several weeks to ensure they had good long-term reliability.

I also tested them in a dark room to test how bright the lights were and the size of the pool of light produced. All were reliable and performed well.

With a significant difference in price between the cheapest and most expensive, there seems to be a well-performing light to suit every budget.

Solar Centre London Post Light **£29.99 for two**



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The light features an on/off switch to override automatically coming on.
Size 40cm (16in) high, 7.5cm (3in) diameter; solar panel 5x4cm (2x1½in)
Lens length 16cm (6½in)
Bulbs two super bright white LEDs
Batteries two 2600mAh 1.2V AA Ni-MH
Quality ★★★★★

steel and the lens from translucent plastic, which provides a diffuse, soft light. The spike is made from corrosion-resistant metal.
Light quality ★★★★★

Light pool 3.6m (12ft) in diameter
Lighting time ★★★★★
Up to 18 hours
Value ★★★★★
Price guide £29.99 for two



WIN A SET OF SOLAR LIGHTS

We have five sets of the Best Buy Solar Centre London Post Lights to give away! Send your name and address to Garden News Solar Lights Giveaway, PO Box 57, Coates, Peterborough PE7 2FE or enter online at www.greatcompetitions.co.uk Closing date is July 24. Please write 'do not contact' if you don't want to be contacted by us or by carefully selected partner organisations.

Cole & Bright Solar Super Bright Stainless Steel Post Light **£69.99 for two**

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As well as using the spike, the base can also be screwed to the ground for use on patios and driveways. There is an on/off switch to override automatically coming on if needed.

Size 62cm (24¾in) high, 12.5cm (5in) diameter; solar panel 10.5x10.5cm (4¼x4¼in)
Lens length 12cm (4¾in)
Bulbs one white LED
Batteries two 400mAh 3.2V AA lithium-ion
Quality ★★★★★
The body of the Cole & Bright Post Light is made from

stainless steel and the lens from glass. The spike is made from plastic.
Light quality ★★★★★
Light pool 9m (30ft) in diameter
Lighting time ★★★★★
Up to 15 hours
Value ★★★★★



Festive Lights Medium Stainless Steel Solar Path Lights **£14 for six**

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Size 28cm (11in) high, 9.5cm (3¾in) diameter; solar panel 5x4.5cm (2x1¾in)
Lens length 7.5cm (3in)
Bulbs one ultra bright LED
Batteries one 300mAh 1.2V AA Ni-MH
Quality ★★★★★
The body of the Festive Lights Path Light is made from stainless steel and the lens from plastic. The spike is made from plastic.
Light quality ★★★★★
Light pool 4.5m (15ft) in diameter
Lighting time ★★★★★
Up to 4 hours
Value ★★★★★



Smart Solar Stainless Steel Post Light **£2.49**

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Size 18cm (7in) high, 3.5cm (1¾in) diameter; solar panel 3x3cm (1¼x1¼in)
Lens length 8cm (3¼in)
Bulbs one energy-saving white LED
Batteries one 200mAh 1.2V AAA Ni-MH
Quality ★★★★★
The body of the Smart Solar Post Light is made from stainless steel and the lens from plastic. The spike is made from plastic.
Light quality ★★★★★
Light pool 1.2m (4ft) in diameter
Lighting time ★★★★★
Up to 12 hours
Value ★★★★★



SolarMate Torino **£24.99**

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Size 34cm (13½in) high, 10.5cm (4¼in) diameter; solar panel 8x8cm (3¼x3¼in)
Lens length 10cm (4in)
Bulbs six white super bright LEDs
Batteries one 400mAh 3.2V AA lithium-ion
Quality ★★★★★
The body of the Torino is made from stainless steel and the lens from glass. The spike is made from aluminium.
Light quality ★★★★★
Light pool 6m (20ft) in diameter
Lighting time ★★★★★
Up to 10 hours
Value ★★★★★



Solar light suppliers

Cole & Bright from Gardman tel:01406 372237; www.gardman.co.uk; Solar Centre tel:08450 941250; www.thesolarcentre.co.uk
Smart Solar tel: 08448 009163; www.smartsolar.co.uk; Festive Lights from Solar Power Centre tel: 01257 792111, www.solarpowercentre.com
SolarMate from Solar Technology International tel: 01684 774000, www.solartechnology.co.uk