

A photograph of a large, two-story house at night, showcasing its exterior features illuminated by landscape lighting. The house has a dark roof, light-colored siding, and a prominent front entrance with a porch. Bare trees are visible in the foreground and background against a dark sky.

The Essential Guide To Hiring A Landscape Lighting Contractor

YOUR ROADMAP TO FINDING THE RIGHT
LANDSCAPE LIGHTING PROFESSIONAL
FOR YOUR HOME AND PROPERTY

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Network	03
Research	04
Legwork	05
Must-haves	05
Want-to-haves	05
The Interview	06
Ready To Make Your Decision?	10

THE ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO HIRING A LANDSCAPE LIGHTING CONTRACTOR

Your home is beautiful. It's perfectly accented by your landscaping, but something is missing and you can't quite put your finger on it. Not until, that is, one evening when you arrive home after dark and trip over a scooter your child left laying half on the lawn and half on the front walk.

Your first thought is not appropriate for this space. Your second thought is a prayer that the neighbors didn't witness your failure to stick the landing. Your third thought is, "Aha!"

Here are a few steps you can take to ensure you hire the best possible landscape lighting contractor.

NETWORK

Start by asking your friends, family members, and co-workers for recommendations. Somebody's brother's cousin-in-law might have a great recommendation for you – you'll never know if you don't ask! Word of mouth referrals are great because you're talking with people who have had first-hand experience with individual contractors. Remember when soliciting personal referrals to ask about contractors people have had negative experiences with too; doing so can ultimately save you a lot of time and grief.

Landscape lighting!" You go inside, pour yourself a strong one, have a stern talk with your child, and begin the process of looking for a landscape lighting contractor.

But what *is* the process? Where do you begin? If you're going to do the job you want it done right, but you have no experience with landscape lighting or lighting contractors, so how are you supposed to choose the best contractor for the job?



Other sources of referrals include your landscaping company, your architect or interior designer, your homebuilder, and websites like [Houzz.com](#) and [Pinterest](#). These websites are also a great source of inspiration and ideas that can help you narrow down what you like and what you don't like.

Having your own idea of your outdoor lighting preferences – design, products and techniques – will come in very handy when communicating with potential contractors.



RESEARCH

When you've narrowed your choices of contractors to a manageable number, say three or four, it's time to dig a little deeper. Check your local Better Business Bureau for reports on the contractors you're considering. It's also a good idea to look for online reviews – do the contractors have Google, Yelp, or [Angie's List reviews](#)?

Check to see if they have websites for their businesses. If they do, see if their websites contain photo galleries of work they've completed. If the contractors have blogs, read them to see if they contain helpful information. This is also a great way to build a list of questions you want to ask when you progress to the actual interviews. Check to see if they have media pages on their websites containing links to articles in local newspapers or trade magazines in which they've been interviewed as experts.

Check out [McKay Lighting's blog](#) and [photo galleries](#), or see [our recent press mentions](#).

LEGWORK

Before contacting contractors, define the scope of the work you're considering, then break your list into two categories:

What are your ...

Must-haves: Walk around your property after dark taking note of areas that need lighting. Since your scooter incident, you know you need path lights from your driveway to your front door. Are your doorways well lit? Are there dark areas where an intruder could hide? Do you have outdoor steps that should be lit for safety? Make a list.

Want-to-haves: Now for the fun stuff...what would you *like* to have in terms of lighting? Would you like to highlight your home's architectural details? Light up your water feature or outdoor kitchen? Spotlight a spectacular tree? You're limited only by your imagination and your budget.



THE INTERVIEW

Once you've completed the steps outlined above, it's time to schedule in-person interviews or quote meetings with the prospective contractors remaining on your list. You have a list of questions prepared for them regarding your specific lighting needs and wants, but there are some general questions you should ask as well.



Questions to Ask:

- How long has your company been in business?
- Is your company insured? Ask to see the certificate of insurance. If they refuse, that's a huge red flag.
- Do you warranty your work? What does your warranty cover? For how long? Make a note of this to compare warranty coverage with coverage offered by the other contractors you'll be interviewing.
- What are our payment options? Most companies will accept cash, check, or credit cards. Typically, you will be asked to pay a third to a half up front to cover the cost of the materials that must be purchased to complete your job with the balance due upon completion.

- **Do you have references and a list of addresses we could drive by?** You want this answer to be "yes." Be sure to check all references and drive by the properties after dark.
- **Do you offer landscape lighting design and installation as well as service programs?** Knowing how and what to light outdoors, which fixtures and techniques to use, and how to light for both beauty and security, takes education, expertise, experience and acumen. Having a designer work with you to plan your system will ensure the end product is one you'll be happy to live with.
- **Will you create a landscape lighting design and show us pictures of what we can expect?** This benefits both you and your contractor. Viewing pictures that demonstrate the elements of your design will help you visualize exactly what your contractor is proposing and will reduce the chance that a miscommunication will lead to problems down the road.
- **What kind of fixtures do you install? Copper, aluminum, composite, etc.?** Given the harsh environmental elements that landscape lighting fixtures have to endure — such as water from rain and irrigation, as well as other factors such as animal urine — it's important to choose a material that can handle the demands of the project.
- **How long will the lighting design phase take and how long can we expect the installation to take?** Obviously, you'd like a timeline and your contractor should be willing to provide one. However, it's important to remember that this type of installation can be weather-dependent, so any timeline you are given will be a rough idea.

ALUMINUM FIXTURES: Aluminum is very affordable but typically of the lowest quality. It's not as durable as other materials. Aluminum is simply not designed to last for long periods of time outdoors; over time, it will oxidize, and the paint will fade.

Aluminum doesn't hold up well around salt and will corrode over time, so it's not recommended for coastal applications. Powder coating will extend the life of an aluminum fixture, as the paint will seal the aluminum — but they're highly affected by the sun's UV rays. In just a few years after installation, you can expect to see these fixtures begin to discolor, or depending on their quality, even chip and peel.

BRASS FIXTURES: Made from a mixture of copper and zinc, brass is a hard metal that holds up well in all environments. Brass fixtures will last for many years and will often have extended warranties. Brass will "patina" (turn darker) over time when exposed to the elements, but it will not corrode and is a great option for outdoor and landscape lighting, especially in coastal environments. Brass fixtures are more expensive than some of the other metals used, but is the best quality and most durable metal, lasting the longest.

COPPER FIXTURES: Copper is another great quality option for outdoor lighting. Copper is not quite as solid as brass, so some manufacturers will make brass fixtures and coat them with copper so you have the best of both worlds: the longevity of brass and the beauty of copper. Copper will also "patina" over time, darkening when exposed to the elements.

COMPOSITE FIXTURES: High quality composite plastics can offer better structural strength than the lighting sets sold in hardware and big box stores. Resistant to corrosion. More affordable than comparable metal fixtures.

- **What ongoing costs can we anticipate if we install a landscape lighting system?** Ongoing costs will depend on the materials you choose. Certain materials wear out faster than others. Additionally, ask about the life expectancy of the bulbs your contractor is using, as bulb replacement will obviously be necessary. If you have down lights placed in trees, you will need them maintained as the trees grow to prevent tree damage. Path lights may need occasional replacement as they are vulnerable to damage due to their location. Children can knock them over playing, your dog's leash might wrap around one and break it, your gardener may inadvertently kick one when mulching. Of course, you will also want to ask about the expected energy consumption of your system as well.
- **Will it be possible to add more fixtures to our system in the future?** This is important if you think you might want to add elements to your property like a patio, deck, water feature, or outdoor kitchen.

HIRING TIPS:

Companies whose main business is not landscape lighting but who install landscape lighting systems may not have dedicated service departments, so while your installation might be wonderful, you may find service on your system to be less than prompt.

If a landscape lighting contractor hands you a catalog and tells you to pick out your own path lights without providing any guidance based on his experience and expertise, you should wonder if he or she has thoroughly studied your plan. This can indicate a lack of commitment to helping you install the best possible system for your needs and budget.



Ready To Make Your Decision?

Finding contractors and selecting the one that's right for you may seem like a lot of work. That's because *it is!* But it's necessary work, as it ensures you'll get the most for your money and landscape lighting you're happy with.

Doing your homework will also give you a high level of confidence in your choice of a contractor, allowing you to establish a great working relationship. When you follow these steps, you'll end up with an outdoor lighting system that both enhances your landscape — and your enjoyment of it! — and offers safety and security for your property and loved ones.

McKay Landscape Lighting *knows* outdoor lighting. They should: It's what we do, and it's *all* we've done for more than 20 years. McKay's nationally licensed designers and highly trained, experienced crews have built a reputation for great design, installation and service in our region and beyond. We've performed thousands of lighting assignments from coast to coast!

Because we're focused solely on outdoor lighting, our customers can rest assured that their completed systems will be both beautiful and functional, and thanks to McKay's service department, it will stay that way.

Ready to hire your landscape lighting provider? Call McKay Landscape Lighting at (866) 663-5434, or [visit our website](#) to learn more about how we can [illuminate your landscape](#). See what a difference McKay makes!