

Making Ripples

Spooky Sustainable Lighting

by Amanda Bancroft

Looking for a spooky way to light your home and yard this Halloween? Consider the eerie illuminations of candles, lamps, and solar lights.

Many people carve Jack-o-Lanterns every autumn when the leaves begin to fall, but not everyone thinks of pumpkins in terms of their sustainable energy potential. A stroll around the Farmer's Market provides a ton of options for finding that perfect pumpkin. This year, I will be carving my very first Jack-o-Lantern! I've watched others carve pumpkins and hollow out gourds for birdhouses, but now it's time for me to give it a go.

Jack-o-Lantern Carving Tips:

1. Choose a flat-bottomed pumpkin so it won't roll around.
2. Cut out the lid at an angle to prevent it from dropping inside.
3. Sprinkle cinnamon or pumpkin spice inside the lid so it smells like a pumpkin pie!

By placing candles inside jars with loose beans, rice or gravel, they can light a path to your porch for trick-or-treaters (or gently illuminate the garden while you drink hot cocoa around a bonfire). Need more jars? Clean out your used jam or spaghetti sauce jars and instead of recycling them, reuse them for candles. Alternatively, create "luminarias" from tea lights and paper bags. Just place a couple inches of sand inside the paper bag, and nestle the tea light into the center.

Candles are almost as controversial as Harry Potter. Candles themselves aren't always sustainable, and can pollute our indoor air, depending on the ingredients and where they're sourced. Avoiding palm oil and paraffin (a petroleum by-product) is a good place to start. Paraffin candles release carcinogenic toxins into the air, and palm oil is sometimes farmed using unsustainable methods that harm overseas ecosystems and displace local populations. You can keep your holiday celebrations cleaner with options like beeswax or soy candles, which often burn longer than paraffin even though they are more expensive.

Now you can dress up like a super hero and capture the power of the sun – literally! If you're like me, and think the tiny pumpkin strings of lights are super cute, you don't have to miss out on them this year to save electricity. Buy solar-powered or LED string lights instead. There are all sorts of pumpkin and holiday-themed solar lights online these days.

Sustainable lighting isn't just great for giving a ghostly glow to your porch, they're great all year 'round. Alternative lights like luminarias, lanterns, candles and solar-powered strings of lights can create a perfect romantic atmosphere or bring a Christmas tree to life without using any

electricity. Working with nature allows nature to work for you. And lighting a candle is more fun than flicking a switch!

Ripples is a blog connecting people to resources on sustainable living while chronicling their off-grid journey and supporting the work of non-profit organizations. Read more on this topic and others at www.RipplesBlog.org