

## **Making Ripples**

by Amanda Bancroft

Get on Santa's nice list by decorating the outside of your house with solar-powered lights and displays! If not this year, shop around for what you want during the season and buy them on sale for next year.

Regardless of whether or not your whole yard will be powered by the sun to radiate goodwill at night, you can explore options for getting a strand or two and starting small. Actually, you have the advantage of buying only one set of a product you like, and testing it out awhile first. If it performs well in your location, buy more. If not, you haven't wasted your money, although solar lighting is comparably priced to conventional electric plug-in lights.

The variety seems endless. There are spotlights, icicle imitations, snowy globes, rainbow dragonflies, and the more common white or multi-colored strands of lights you can string on an outdoor tree or home exterior. There are bell jar and lantern designs that make it appear that you've captured fireflies or fairies who have agreed to illuminate your home (inside or out). Anything used indoors must still be charged outside in sunlight. Personally, I enjoy the candle-flickering effect of some solar lanterns that create a romantic ambiance.

These lights are charged by the sun during the day, so be sure to put the solar panel ground stakes in a sunny area and not in the shadow of the house or under a bush. Speaking from experience, it does take a little thinking to figure out where the most sunlight will hit the yard during the winter solstice. It helps to take note of long shadows in the morning and evening. When it's cloudy or rainy several days in a row, you might notice your lights are dim or that some won't turn on. However, if a single light breaks, the rest of the strand should still work – the whole thing won't need replacing, just the broken bulb. Decorate your yard close to dusk so that the lights will have a chance to charge that day, and you can see how they're arranged while you're setting them up. This way you can be sure you're happy with the results.

They automatically turn on when they detect lower light conditions. It's not uncommon for the lights to stay on up to eight hours. Settings such as on/off, twinkling, or a wave effect are typically available. You can buy solar holiday lights at Wal-Mart, Home Depot, Amazon or at most places where lights are sold. Prices range from \$5 per strand of basic white lights, to \$50 for more complex designs. If you really want a bargain, buy lighting that can double as wedding décor, a table centerpiece, summer garden lighting, pool party lights, and so on. Then you really can "make it last all year!"

Amanda Bancroft is a writer, artist, and naturalist living in an off-grid tiny house on Kessler Mountain. She and her husband Ryan blog about their adventures and offer tips to those wanting to make a difference at [www.MakeRipples.org](http://www.MakeRipples.org).