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The Well-Lit Home

“Get light right” with the best bulbs for each room.

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Get ready, because what has been considered “standard” lighting is about to change. The incandescent bulb, which has been around for over 125 years, is now being “phased out” by governments around the world in favor of more energy-efficient alternatives.

Wattage, too, is undergoing some adjustments. In keeping with a federal law passed in 2007, manufacturers can no longer sell 100-watt or 75-watt incandescent light bulbs in the United States. After 2014, they can no longer produce 40-watt or 60-watt bulbs.

Don’t be surprised if next time you go to the store, you can’t find the bulbs you’ve been buying for the last decade.

Here is some insight on the types of bulbs available today—and some tips for choosing the best ones for your needs.

Know the Types Today there are basically three categories of bulbs: Halogen, CFL (compact fluorescent light) and LED (light-emitting diode).

HALOGEN A variation on the incandescent bulb, halogen bulbs are not new to the scene. They have a filament like their predecessors, but they last far longer (up to 2,000 hours).

Halogen bulbs are great for high-intensity spot lighting, e.g., a reading

lamp, highlighting artwork, task lighting. Their disadvantage is that they can become extremely hot to the touch, so caution is warranted.



CFL CFLs have been around in various shapes and forms for the last several years. When first released most had corkscrew shapes, but now they often mimic the shape of old-fashioned bulbs. CFLs are extremely energy-efficient, using 75% less energy and lasting up to 10 times longer than the equivalent incandescent light.

The disadvantage of CFLs is that many are not “instant on,” meaning they can take up to a minute to reach full brightness. Also, many CFLs are not dimmable. For these reasons, I like to use CFLs in areas where I need general overall light (e.g., lamps and recess lighting in dens, bedrooms, and hallways) where the light is left on for extended periods of time and dimming is not an issue.

CFLs are good for children’s areas because they are cool to the touch and pose no risk for burns. They are also great for enclosed areas where you don’t want to generate additional heat.

LED LED is the latest technology to hit the market. Because the technology is contained in microchips, these bulbs can be very small. Their biggest advantages are their longevity and energy efficiency—they use 75% less energy than incandescent bulbs and they last up to three times longer than CFL bulbs (in many cases 25,000-30,000 hours). They are also cool to the touch, and their small size makes them a great option for areas that are difficult to reach like under-cabinet lighting.

The main disadvantage—for now—is the cost. Compared to a standard incandescent bulb cost of \$1, an LED bulb can coast upwards of \$15 or more. But their extreme longevity makes LED the less-expensive choice over time.

Most LED bulbs emit light in only one direction so they are better for spot and focused lighting. However, many companies are now beginning to produce traditionally shaped LED technology that emits light in all directions.

How to Select One

Now that you have a better idea of what type of bulb you may want, you still have the daunting task to figure out which “size” you need. The old days of purchasing bulbs by wattage—75 watts, 40 watts or 100 watts—are over. Now you need to concern yourself with two measurements:



(above) When first released most had corkscrew shapes, but now they often mimic the shape of old-fashioned bulbs.



| Lighting Facts (per bulb) | |
|--|-----------------|
| Brightness | 840 lumens |
| Estimated Yearly Energy Cost | \$5.78 |
| Based on 3 hrs/day, 11¢/kWh Cost depends on rates and use | |
| Life | 3.8 Years |
| Based on 3 hrs/day | |
| Light Appearance | Warm ————— Cool |
| | 2650 K |
| Energy Used | 48 watts |

Lumens and Kelvin. Most manufacturers today place a lighting facts label on the packaging for your reference. Here are a couple of things to know when assessing the label:

LUMENS is the measurement of light output. The larger the number, the brighter the light. This measurement—for all practical purposes—is taking the place of the “watts” we are accustomed to. Here’s a rule of thumb: a 100-watt incandescent bulb puts out approximately 1600 lumens. So if you see a bulb listed at 800 lumens, you know that it is equivalent to a 50-watt bulb.

KELVIN is the scale of a light’s color. The scale goes from about 2000K (a very red-orange shade) on one end to about 8000K at the other end (a very blue shade, which most people tend to feel uncomfortable with). A traditional incandescent bulb emits a “warmer” light, usually around 2700K. So if you want that look, shoot for the 2700-3000K range. A bulb in the 4000-5000K range creates a light quality that is much whiter, with no hints of yellow. This is an excellent choice for task lighting, a reading lamp, or lighting artwork. I also select a whiter light when lighting white rooms or pale colors.

Your Light Bulb Shortlist

So the next time you find yourself standing in front of an aisle of light bulbs, remember the three things to look for:

1. Technology. What type of bulb would work best—CFL, Halogen, or LED?
2. Lumens. How bright do I want the light to be?
3. Kelvin. What color quality do I want?

You’ll be all set to create a warm, inviting home!

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