

Tried & tested

we try before you buy



Solar spotlights

Consumer editor **Julia Heaton** finds out which of six solar spot lights for the garden outshines the rest under test conditions

WITH SOLAR powered lights you can continue to enjoy the sunshine even after the sun has gone down. Cheaper than mains lighting and easy to fit, solar spots are the kind you can really have fun with, illuminating a specimen tree one night and a water feature the next. They come with a ground spike so you can move them around at will, something you can't do with mains. They're also useful to cast light down a passageway or onto steps as a safety measure - some even come with wall or deck fixings.

We put six spot lights to the test

over a period of 10 days - charging the batteries for three days first before switching on. Then the main job was to ensure the solar panels were carefully positioned to capture maximum exposure to the sun and keep the batteries charged. In some cases the LED's were extremely bright, lasting from dusk until after bedtime - Trento switching off after six hours to conserve energy. In all cases the batteries should last about two years, and can be replaced with standard rechargeable ones.

All of the lights could be switched off to save energy for the next night.

14/15

HELIOS SOLAR SPOTLIGHT
£19.99 INC P&P

01727 841014
thesolarcentre.co.uk



Features ★★★★★

Solid die-cast, rust-proof aluminium body, pointed metal stake and wall mounting kit. Wide tilt on the solar panel and adjustable head that tightens to face through 180 degrees. Four LED's. 4½in (11.5cm) high x 3¾in (9.5cm) wide. Battery: 2 x 1.2V 1000mAh Ni-MH.

Performance ★★★★★

Super bright thanks to the beefy battery power. A heavyweight quality feel - the metal stake being the easiest to drive into soil or grass and the head the easiest to adjust in situ. Only pipped by the best buy because of its longer range.

Value ★★★★★

Great features, great performance, a super product for the price.

13/15

TRENTO LIGHT
£49.99 INC P&P

0800 774755
solartechnology.co.uk



Features ★★★★★

Non-rust aluminium body; brown powder coated finish stake; SMD Nichia LED and shatterproof lens. Solar panel tilts to catch daylight. Lamp head has a wild tilt. 3.2V 1000mAh battery. 9½in (24cm) high x 6in (15cm) wide x 5in (13cm) deep. Two year warranty.

Performance ★★★★★

Had a vintage feel and was one of the most attractive lights in the group. It shone a lovely, warm white "film star" circle against a vertical wall, and gave the clearest view of a large feature. Concise, informative instructions.

Value ★★★★★

Ideal for highlighting large features but pricey compared to the best buy.

9/15

STAINLESS STEEL SPOTLIGHT
£7.99

Cole & Bright
01406 372227 gardman.co.uk for stockists



Features ★★★★★

Stainless steel with static solar panel. Head adjusts through 45 degrees. Uses one 1.2V 300mAh (AA) battery. The on/off switch is cleverly located in a waterproof spot between panel and stake. 9in (23cm) high x 4in (10cm) wide x 8½in (22cm) deep.

Performance ★★★★★

Produced a fair amount of light in concentric rings rather than a pool of light - more atmospheric than anything. Useful for shedding light on something like a small ornament. Minimal instructions compared to the others.

Value ★★★★★

Good for this price if you need a few, and proved reliable for the period on test.

7/15

SOLAR SUPER BRIGHT SPOTLIGHT
£4.99

0845 026 7598
therange.co.uk for nearest store



Features ★★★★★

Spotlight with four small LEDs, plastic casing and stake, a small movable solar panel and swivel head that tilts fully forwards and backwards. Contains a 600mA-h (AA) battery. 5in (20cm) high; 3¾in (9.5cm) wide; 6½in (16cm) deep.

Performance ★★★★★

Information on the label suggested a 12 hour charge, but it gave a much dimmer output after the initial three day charge than higher end products. The effect is a small, clear spot, enough to direct light onto a small feature or potted plant. The chunky stake proved a little tricky to push into grass.

Value ★★★★★

The cheaper price is a false economy.

6/15

2 X SOLAR SPOT LIGHTS
£9.99

01257 792111
festive-lights.com



Features ★★★★★

A box of two small solar spotlights, each with three small LEDs, static, amorphous solar panel, and tilting 180° swivel head. Comes with one 1.2V 250mAh (AAA) battery. 7½in (17cm) high x 3¾in (8.5cm) wide x 4in (10in) deep.

Performance ★★★★★

Clear instructions to set up this compact set, which had short ground stakes that made them top heavy. After maximum charge the light emitted was a warm pool similar to the Range product and one of the lights failed after the second night. A surprising result from this, usually excellent company.

Value ★★★★★

A poor, disappointing result.

THEA SPOTLIGHT £29.99 INC P&P

01727 841014
thesolarcentre.co.uk

Features ★★★★★

Four LEDs illuminate this product powered via 1.6W mono-crystalline solar panel combined with high capacity 3 x 1500mAh Ni-Mh (AA) batteries. Fittings include a wall mount with screws and extending plastic stake. Made of toughened plastic, the head adjusts fully back and forward, and solar panel from side to side. 12in (30cm) high extending to 17in (43cm); 5½in (14cm) wide; 6¾in (17cm) deep.

Performance ★★★★★

The most powerful bright light, as effective as mains! The hood over the light prevented glare and it was easy to adjust or move about - the extra length of stake helping to raise the unit clear of planting. The strong light illuminated an outbuilding, and when moved further away the span was wider yet still extremely bright. Excellent instructions.

Value ★★★★★

Out-performed the cheaper ones. Reliable through the test - a great purchase.



15/15

Amateur Gardening
BEST BUY

All prices correct at time of going to press and may vary at garden centres

KID'S RETREAT

Let their imaginations run wild with these three outdoor dens

WIGWAM £54.99 P&P £4.95

Big Game Hunters

01865 392439 biggamehunters.co.uk

They'll be transported straight to the American west with this authentic looking wigwam. Made from water resistant cotton canvas that's held aloft with strong wooden poles its easy to set up. And at 55in (1.4m) x 74in (1.9m) it's easy to store too.



VW POP UP CAMPER VAN

£55 P&P £3.95

The Great Little Trading Company

0344 848 6000 gltc.co.uk

There's a journey full of adventure to be had during the summer holidays in this clever little den. Waterproof and UV safe the pop-up comes in red for four up or blue for two. There's even a wheel-shed bag to store it in.



CACOON £225 P&P £6.50

The Toy Barn

01935 815040 toy-barn.co.uk

Child or adult, when you snuggle into a cocoon you'll never want to leave. Made from washable water resistant canvas it's a tent, wigwam and tree house rolled into one. Hang it from a tree then hang around inside.

