

— LIT OUTDOOR LIGHTING

A HOMEOWNER'S GUIDE

# Red *Flags*

*Every homeowner should know before hiring an outdoor lighting company.*

Eight things we've seen go wrong — and exactly what to look for instead.

NO SALES PITCH  
JUST HONEST FIELD NOTES

WELCOME

# Before you spend a *dollar* on outdoor lighting, read this.

We've walked a lot of properties where the lighting was already installed — and already failing. Cloudy lenses. Dim fixtures. Plastic housings cracked by a single Louisiana summer. Systems that cost the homeowner four, five, sometimes ten thousand dollars, and looked rough within two years.

Almost every single time, the problem wasn't the homeowner's taste. It was the install. Or the fixtures. Or the designer. Or all three.

This guide lays out the eight **red flags** we see most often — the ones that tell you, before you sign anything, whether the company in front of you is going to do this right or sell you something you'll regret.

## **Our promise to you**

Nothing in this guide is a pitch for us. If you read it, take notes, and hire a different company entirely — great. You'll still end up with a better system than if you hadn't. That's the whole point.

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# The eight *red flags*

*Each one is a real pattern we've seen in the field — with a simple test you can use when you're interviewing contractors.*

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# 01

RED FLAG NO. ONE

## Big-box kits & *plastic* fixtures.

### — WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

The contractor suggests a \$300 "lighting kit" from a home improvement store — eight plastic path lights, a plastic transformer, and a spool of cheap wire. They'll tell you it's the same stuff the pros use. It isn't.

### — WHY IT'S A PROBLEM

Those fixtures are built to hit a price point, not to last. Plastic lenses cloud within 12 months. Internal LED drivers burn out in 2–3 years. The finish flakes. And because the fixtures are sealed units with no replaceable bulb, when one fails the whole thing goes in the trash — and your "affordable" lighting system gets expensive fast.

### — WHAT TO LOOK FOR INSTEAD

Cast **brass or copper** fixtures with **replaceable LED modules**, rated for wet outdoor conditions, with a manufacturer warranty of 5 years or more. These fixtures cost more up front and save a fortune over a decade.

# 02

RED FLAG NO. TWO

## The *jack-of-all-trades* contractor.

### — WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

A general landscaper, electrician, or handyman adds "lighting installs" to the list of services on their truck. They don't specialize in it — they just carry fixtures around, and they'll get to yours between a sod job and a pool pump repair.

### — WHY IT'S A PROBLEM

Outdoor lighting isn't plug-and-play. A good design requires understanding voltage drop across long wire runs, beam spread for different features, color temperature on different surfaces, and how a layout reads at 9 p.m. versus 2 a.m. A generalist aims lights *at* the tree. A specialist lights the tree so it looks like a painting. The difference is immediate — and permanent.

### — WHAT TO LOOK FOR INSTEAD

A company that does **outdoor lighting only**. Ask directly: what percentage of your revenue comes from outdoor lighting? If it's under 80%, keep looking.

# 03

RED FLAG NO. THREE

## Short or *missing* warranties.

### — WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

A 90-day warranty. A "one-year labor only" warranty. Or the version we hate most: *"Warranties vary by manufacturer — you'd have to contact them directly."*

### — WHY IT'S A PROBLEM

Quality LED fixtures are engineered to last a decade or more. When a company offers only a 90-day or 1-year warranty, it means one of two things: they don't trust the fixtures they're installing, or they don't want to be on the hook when something fails. Both are disqualifying.

*"You can learn almost everything you need to know about a contractor by the length of the warranty they're willing to put in writing."*

### — WHAT TO LOOK FOR INSTEAD

A **minimum 5-year warranty** on the fixtures themselves, and at least a **1-year labor warranty** on the install. Multi-year fixture warranties of 10+ years are a strong signal of confidence in the product.

# 04

RED FLAG NO. FOUR

## No *night demo* offered.

### — WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

The contractor drops off a written quote and asks for a deposit — without ever showing you what the finished system will actually look like lit up at night.

### — WHY IT'S A PROBLEM

Outdoor lighting is a visual product. Renderings can't capture it. Photos can't capture it. You have to see it on *your* house, on *your* trees, after dark, to know if it's what you want. A night demo takes 30 to 45 minutes. Any company that won't do one is asking you to buy a suit without trying it on — and then to pay five thousand dollars for it.

### — WHAT TO LOOK FOR INSTEAD

A contractor who **proactively offers a free night demo** as part of the consultation process. They should bring real fixtures, place them in a few key spots on your property, and show you the actual effect before you commit to anything.

# 05 RED FLAG NO. FIVE

## A quote without a *site visit*.

### — WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

You send a few phone photos. They send back a quote. Or they give you a price over the phone based on your home's square footage — no visit, no walk-through, no questions about what you actually want to highlight.

### — WHY IT'S A PROBLEM

Every property is different. Tree placements, hardscape materials, where the power runs, sightlines from the street, how your landscaping will grow in, where the wiring can be routed — none of this is visible from a photo. A contractor who quotes blind is either lowballing to win the job (and raising the price once they're on site), or they're not designing anything at all. They're just selling you a packaged count of fixtures.

### — WHAT TO LOOK FOR INSTEAD

An **in-person daytime site visit** for measurement and design — and ideally a **night demo** after that to show you the effect before you commit.

# 06

RED FLAG NO. SIX

## No talk about *color temperature*.

### — WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

The word "Kelvin" never comes up. Neither does "warm" versus "cool." The contractor just says "white LEDs" and moves on to the price.

### — WHY IT'S A PROBLEM

The difference between 2700K and 4000K is the difference between your home looking warm and inviting — or looking like a gas station parking lot. Color temperature also has to match the architecture: warm stone and brick want one temperature, cool grays and modern architecture want another. This is one of the top three factors in whether your finished system looks beautiful or off. A contractor skipping it is skipping a load-bearing part of the design.

### — WHAT TO LOOK FOR INSTEAD

A designer who asks you about the **look you want** (warm vs. crisp), explains the **Kelvin scale** plainly, and recommends a specific color temperature with reasoning behind it.

# 07 RED FLAG NO. SEVEN

## An *undersized* transformer.

### — WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

The contractor runs twenty fixtures pulling around 200 watts off a 300-watt transformer — *"because it's cheaper, and we can always upgrade later."*

### — WHY IT'S A PROBLEM

Transformers should be sized to run at roughly 60 to 70 percent of their rated capacity for long-term durability. Push them past 90 percent and they run hot, fail early, and the lights at the end of the longest wire run go dim. "We can upgrade later" almost always means re-digging the yard, re-running wire, and paying again — for something that should have been sized correctly on day one.

### — WHAT TO LOOK FOR INSTEAD

A transformer sized with **at least 20–30% headroom**, and ideally **multi-tap** so voltage can be adjusted to compensate for drop across long wire runs. Ask the contractor to tell you the transformer size and total load in watts — they should know both numbers on the spot.

# 08

RED FLAG NO. EIGHT

## No *maintenance plan* offered.

### — WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

"We install it, and we're out of your life." No scheduled return visits, no cleaning, no re-aiming after the trees grow in, no catching failures early.

### — WHY IT'S A PROBLEM

Outdoor lighting is a living system. Fixtures get bumped by lawnmowers. Lenses get dirty and dim by 20–30% after a year of pollen, mud, and rain. Trees grow and change what the light hits. Drivers and bulbs eventually fail. Without maintenance, even a beautifully-designed system looks tired within two years — and all that money you spent up front starts looking like a bad investment.

*"The day after the install is the best your system will ever look — unless someone comes back to maintain it."*

### — WHAT TO LOOK FOR INSTEAD

A company that offers a **scheduled maintenance plan** — at minimum, two service visits per year to clean lenses, re-aim fixtures, and replace failing components before the system goes dark.

# Ten questions to ask *any* lighting contractor.

*Print this, bring it to your consultations, and write down their answers. The right company will welcome all ten.*

- 01** What percentage of your work is outdoor lighting specifically?
- 02** How long have you been installing outdoor lighting?
- 03** Can I see three to five recent installs in my area?
- 04** What's the manufacturer's warranty on the fixtures you're recommending?
- 05** What's your labor warranty — and what does it actually cover?
- 06** Will you do a night demo before I sign anything?
- 07** What color temperature are you recommending, and why?
- 08** What size transformer are you using, and what's the total load in watts?
- 09** Do you offer a maintenance plan? What exactly is included?
- 10** What happens if a fixture fails in year three? In year five? In year ten?

— A NOTE FROM OUR TEAM

# We hope this *helps* — no matter who you hire.

We started Lit Outdoor Lighting in 2021. Outdoor lighting is all we do — not patios, not pools, not landscaping. Just lighting, done well.

Every system we install uses high-grade LED fixtures with a minimum 5-year warranty, properly-sized transformers, and a custom design tailored to your specific home. Night demos are free. Maintenance plans are available. And our consultations are exactly what the eight *red flags* in this guide would tell you to look for.

If you'd like to see what your home could look like lit up, we'd love to show you. And if you end up hiring someone else — as long as they pass the tests in this guide — we're genuinely happy for you.

*Melissa & Jonathan*

READY TO SEE IT

Book a *free* consultation.

CALL OR TEXT

**(985) 244-7733**