

Living

# Fairy lights: no need to let go of the glow

Madeleine Howell suggests keeping that magical winter sparkle going, and speaks to advocates of year-round illuminations

The festive season already seems long behind us, but not all traces of cheer have disappeared. A comforting glow still emanates from balconies and is glimpsed through windows as we cling to the magic of fairy lights, casting a sparkling spell that need not fade with memories of celebrations. Indeed, fairy lights are being increasingly adopted by designers and influencers and stylish folk in general, who need no excuse to employ their gentle illumination and enduring sense of childhood delight. Here, devotees of the little wonders explain their charm and share their fairy wisdom.

  
**LAURA BRAND**  
*Unbridled joy*



“The right kind of lighting directly impacts our moods and emotions. Not unlike candlelight, fairy lights immediately infuse a space with warmth, charm and romance,” says Laura Brand, author of *The Joy Journal for Magical Everyday Play*. Fairy lights, she says, need not only be for Christmas, but offer much-needed visual delight year-round. For those of us who were loath to pack away our baubles and beads, trans-seasonal fairy lighting – with which it remains acceptable to tastefully deck your halls and shrubbery – is a cheering solution for homes and gardens otherwise bereft of adornment, sparking joy into February and beyond. “Anything that promotes relaxation and nurtures hibernation mode in a positive way is welcome in our home,” she says. “Fairy lights are a simple

▲ Fairy lights draped over a headboard create a dreamy look; Laura Brand, below



Follow Laura Brand @ thejoyjournal; *The Joy Journal for Magical Everyday Play: Easy Activities & Creative Craft for Kids and their Grown-ups* (Bluebird, £12.99; available from Telegraph Books).

decorative touch, but bring playfulness to a room. It doesn’t matter what age you are. I experience the same sense of awe and delight when I enter a dreamily star-scaped scene as children do. To me, indulging my inner child is a healthy, liberating act of self-care, too often pushed aside by ‘grown up’ responsibilities.” In the home she shares with her husband, writer and comedian Russell Brand, and their two daughters, Mabel and Peggy, fairy lights and piles of cushions add cosiness to a white cotton tepee, used in the garden in summer for shade and as a quiet, relaxed reading den indoors in winter. In their garden is a “very ad hoc mud kitchen” for outdoor play in nature, made with wooden pallets and planks of wood, with a painted sign, saucepans, mugs and utensils. “It’s a place totally free of rules, to embrace the mud whatever the weather, which is exactly why I added fairy lights – to make it inviting even on darker, colder afternoons,” says Brand. And when the sun sets, the enchantment continues. “Retreating to a fairy-lit reading nook, decorating the table for dinner or scattering the coffee table with sparkling jam jars of battery-powered fairy lights – like captured magic – makes the never-ending family time at home feel just that little bit more special.”



◀ Charlotte-Anne Fidler’s cottage in the country is covered in lights

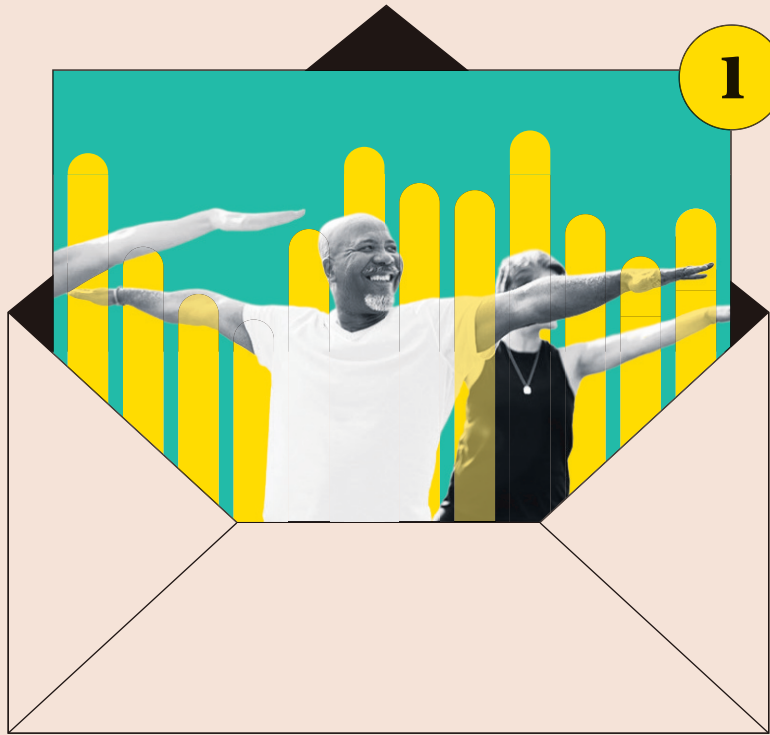
shrubbery, and you’re left with little pinpricks of light emphasising their shape. I find it more whimsical than sophisticated garden lighting. They’d look fairground-y all over the garden, but define the space around the porch. In winter, they’re inviting among potted white cyclamen, and at dusk in spring (with cheery yellow ‘tête-à-tête’ or white ‘thalia’ narcissus) or on a balmy summer evening they make me feel like I’m at a party. They work through all seasons: with chrysanthemums, violas, an autumnal wreath and pumpkins at Hallowe’en, and with colourful Chinese lanterns on birthdays. “In the house, we have fairy lights in the girls’ bedrooms and in practical utility areas that might otherwise look drab, such as above the coat hooks and bench where the girls keep their shoes, and in the kitchen. I wouldn’t put them in the sitting room other than at Christmas – that would be too ‘student flat’ – though we do have fairy lights in our attic guest bedroom, left over after a birthday sleepover. They’re great on a kitchen mantle, if you have one, or to add visual interest to the kitchen table. That table is where I work and homeschool (it’s the warmest part of the house, and freezing cold everywhere else), so I tend to have a centrepiece to draw the eye, and lay fairy lights among seasonal flowers. I browse Cox & Cox for inspiration, but I buy them from bog standard garden centres. “Fairy lights aren’t expensive – they’re like cheap magic. You don’t have to have the dream country house; they look equally magical on an urban balcony. Choose flattering warm, soft white lights, rather than harsh, cold blue lights, and for the garden, get outdoor sockets fitted. Battery lights only last five minutes, and are less eco-friendly. But don’t be sparse or stingy – more is more.”

For more country house, country life, and country garden with added sparkle, follow @charlotteannefidler

The Telegraph

## Your daily dose of health

Sign up to our **365 Newsletter** and receive a quick and easy fitness or wellbeing tip, technique or workout straight to your inbox every day of the year.



Sign up now at [telegraph.co.uk/365](https://telegraph.co.uk/365)

  
**CHARLOTTE-ANNE FIDLER**  
*Lighting up rural life*

Country-dweller Charlotte-Anne Fidler is another advocate for fairy lighting in all seasons, and often shares ideas from the envy-inducing, fairy-light strewn cottage she shares with her daughters Anouk, 17, and Bo, 12, and their three Maine Coon cats. A former glossy magazine fashion director and the founder of earth-friendly children’s skincare brand Spots & Stripes, she hangs them at the front entrance of their Wiltshire home

year-round, to the delight of her 107,000 Instagram followers, who yearn for the archetypal “cottage-core” dream the scene embodies. “There’s a reason they’re called fairy lights,” she explains. “They’re magical things – dots of light, like fairies or glow-worms – lovely when it gets dark at 5pm, and when everything is a bit grim. When I moved to the country from London, I put them out in full force. It’s much darker here, without the street lights. I

wondered if they’d look pub-like rather than fairytale-like over the front door, but they never cease to cheer me up and give me pleasure, even when I’ve just driven back from the supermarket, or when I’ve been out weeding. “Around the entrance, I’ve wound them around dark green box topiary balls and cones (*Buxus sempervirens*) in pots, lighting up the evening like little sculptures. The wires disappear into the

  
**MELANIE PORTER**  
*A positive spin on sparkle*

Designer-maker Melanie Porter’s personalised, twinkling designs are stocked at Liberty and Not on the High Street. Porter studied fashion design at Central Saint Martins, and uses traditional, labour-intensive techniques to craft her creations by hand on a traditional spinning wheel. Her designs include stars and wreath shapes with names and phrases written in pom-pom fairy lights, fairy light initials on leopard-print string, and framed glass prints of fairy-lit song lyrics – a special gift for newlyweds or big birthdays (or to yourself, just because). “I try to create that ‘Wow’ moment of surprise and delight – like an indoor firework,” says Porter. “I spent months learning to spin, from my mum and from YouTube tutorials with Steph Gorin.” Her botanical gold-leaf fairy lights (from £24) are suited to indoor and outdoor styling: the warm white micro LED fairy lights with gold leaves on 2m of delicate pink spun thread are battery-powered. “Lockdown has led to an

uplift in sales, particularly of lights given as gifts. I add personalised gift notes, so people send them to loved ones. As nightlights in children’s bedrooms, they can be switched off as a symbolic ‘time-to-sleep’ moment, or left switched on for a comforting glow. I created an NHS fairy-lit heart in the first lockdown, with proceeds going to the NHS Covid-19 appeal. My husband is a medic, working tirelessly as an NHS doctor. We light it every night.”

Shop: [melanieporter.co.uk](https://melanieporter.co.uk); Instagram: @melanie\_porter\_design



▲ Melanie Porter creates pom-pom fairy lights, above



### Melanie Porter’s seven top tips for styling fairy lights

► **Play with scale.** I’ve always been inspired by the interior designer Abigail Ahern in this – the tininess of lights floating in space creates enchantment and complements other statement features. ► **It’s tempting to drape fairy lights** around the exterior of a frame or mirror, but you should also try lights confined within a vessel. I like a muddle of lights

within a bell jar, or a simple glass vase. ► **Always take a set of lights with you to a picnic.** If it gets dark, grab a stick and coil the lights around it, for an impromptu twinkling stake to extend the evening. ► **Fairy lights and greenery work well together.** Decorate your house plants just as you would a Christmas tree. Place fairy lights in and among sea

glass, shells and pebbles to make pretty corners reminiscent of a day at the seaside. ► **Old-fashioned cut glass and coloured glass** reflects fairy lights in a striking way; polish off your best glassware and hunt for vintage buys to create a rapturous display. ► **Browse Pinterest** for visual inspiration. I’m always amazed by how creative people can be.