

At home: Making the most of lighting can keep moods lifted

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Sunset is arriving noticeably earlier, meaning less mood-lifting daylight for everyone. The weather is turning colder, so we'll soon spend even more time cooped up inside the homes where we've huddled, and sometimes completely quarantined, for six months.

Many of us are working and studying at home by day, then trying to shift

into relaxation mode in the very same rooms at night. And we're doing all of this while battling the many stresses that 2020 keeps on delivering.

If ever there was an autumn when things could be a bit brighter, this is it.

So while better [light](#) bulbs or a repositioned lamp won't solve everything, it's a great year to reassess the way your home is lit—and possibly make some changes.

DIFFERENTIATE NIGHT FROM DAY

It's hard to step away from work or school when you're living in your workspace. One way to shift the mood and tell your body and brain that it's time to relax is to change the lighting when day becomes night.

By day, use lightbulbs that mimic daylight (about 5000 Kelvin). Virginia-based architect Warren Ralston says this is usually the lighting we see in offices, because its cool white hue offers plenty of energizing brightness.

Smart LED bulbs can be set to this brightness in the morning and kept there all day.

"Another great thing about 5000K daylight LED is how well it works for [video conferencing](#)," says Atlanta-based interior designer Brian Patrick Flynn. "Anytime I'm working from home, I turn on the overhead LEDs and it eliminates yellowy shadows from the videos."

When your workday is over, switch to lamps and fixtures fitted with traditional warm bulbs or set your smart bulbs to a lower intensity (about 3000-3500 Kelvin, or as low as 2500 for very warm light).

Many types of smart lightbulbs can be adjusted easily with a remote control or through an app, Flynn says. "This is hugely helpful for

creating ambience and warmth versus using pure daylight for work purposes."

You can also set your lights on timers, so your preferred evening lighting comes on automatically.

LIGHT YOUR THINGS, NOT YOUR ROOMS

Brightening up your home may be about repositioning the lights you already have, rather than adding more.

"Light has to reflect off of something in order for your eyes to perceive that light," Ralston explains. "So you don't really light a space. You light a surface. You're lighting a wall or a floor or an object."

Try positioning lamps or overhead lights so the light bounces off items you want to highlight, or off surfaces like a glossy tabletop or lustrous fabric.

Consider rearranging furniture and art to make better use of the light coming from ceiling fixtures and sconces.

Ralston sometimes uses virtual reality technology to show clients what a room will look like at different times of day, and how lighting options would look paired with different furnishings. He says they're often surprised at how different the light looks depending on what surfaces surround it.

WARM YOUR SPACE WITH FIRELIGHT

In the fall, lighting a few logs in a traditional fireplace is a great way to shift the mood in your home. And if you don't have a fireplace, you can still enjoy that same warmth and flickering light, says designer and

sculptor Elena Colombo, who creates fire features that range from elaborate outdoor installations to delicate tabletop fire bowls.

A small fire bowl can be used on a [coffee table](#) or as a centerpiece on a dining-room table to create a warm, welcoming, flickering light that's a step beyond what candles offer, Colombo says. Many fire bowls burn an alcohol-based gel that requires no ventilation.

"As soon as your eye sees the flame," she says, "it just changes your mood."

When choosing your source of indoor firelight, just be sure to follow any fire safety restrictions where you live.

And when night falls, Colombo suggests switching on a few low-wattage lights near the door to your deck or patio. Just having a view of your warmly lit outdoor space can keep you from feeling penned in on a dark autumn night. It will make your home feel more expansive, and maybe even inspire you to grab a sweater and sit out under the stars.

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