

TURTLE-FRIENDLY LIGHTING ON THE BEACH

If you have been intending to make sure your outside light fixtures do not disturb nesting sea turtles and don't lead hatchlings away from the water and into harm's way, see the following helpful advice from Blair Witherington via Sea Turtle Biology and Conservation. [CTURTLE@LISTS.UFL.EDU] Blair is co-author of Florida's Living Beaches, the most useful book to have in a Gulfside beach cottage.

"Turtle friendly lighting" is lights that serve our interests with minimal effects on sea turtles. Any light source can be turtle friendly to the extent that it is hidden from the nesting beach. A lot of commonly available light sources have designs that make this task easier. The list includes fixtures with baffles and shielding that direct light efficiently downward, which is normally where we want light (so we can see where we step). Fixtures that shine upward and outward are in the unfriendly category, which includes sources usually meant to be more decorative than functional.

To ensure that good lights don't go bad, take a stroll on the beach at night. Walk up and down the beach near your residence and look for lights. An upright posture is fine—no need to crawl like a turtle. If you can see light from any artificial sources, including indirect light from glowing buildings or trees, then there may be a problem for nearby nesting turtles and their hatchlings trying to find the sea.

For developed areas with complex lighting needs, it's difficult to hide all the light. Best practices here are to hide lighting as completely as possible and use long-wavelength (red, orange-yellow) sources where some light leaks out. Many of the best long-wavelength sources are LED lamps.

As a general rule, humans see this reddish light better than sea turtles do. But the light is not invisible to sea turtles, so like fat-free cookies, moderation is suggested.

Because light near the horizon is most attractive to sea-finding turtle hatchlings, and because blocking a light is often as good as turning it off, it's very helpful to keep a naturally vegetated dune between any lighted area and the nesting beach. A nice dune silhouette will cover a multitude of lighting sins, including light from house windows. Really? My house windows, too? Well, considering that the light projected from windows at night helps only those outside to see in, then drawing the drapes seems reasonable if only for modesty's sake. Seeking ways to live with sea turtles may mean occasionally examining ourselves for modesty.