

Home & Garden

How to make your rooms light and bright, even in wintertime



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When winter sets in and days are shorter and darker, the change in light can wreak havoc on our sleep schedules and moods. But coming home and sitting in a poorly lit, dark space doesn't have to be part of the season. Here's how design experts make rooms feel bright and cheery, even in the dead of winter.

[\[Stressed out? Here are 10 science-backed design tips for bringing serenity to your home.\]](#)

Create layered lighting

You'll get more use out of your lights in the winter than any other time of the year, so make sure you're adequately prepared. And don't despair if you don't have lots of windows, advises Sarah Barney, owner and principal designer of [BANDD Design](#) in Austin. "Embrace what you have since there's only so much you can do." Here's how to build a layered lighting scheme:

Overhead lighting: This is the base that washes the whole room in light. “The type of fixture makes all the difference,” says Erin Shakoor, the Chicago-based founder of [Shakoor Interiors](#). “Put it as high above your head as possible to avoid dead spots.” She likes fixtures with adjustable arms so you can redirect light into areas as necessary. (Many overhead fixtures in rentals can be easily swapped and replaced; check with your landlord.)

Wall and floor lamps: Place wall sconces and floor lamps in strategic locations where you want to highlight wall decor. “The best-lit rooms are the ones where the walls are lit,” says [LeeAnn Baker](#), a Seattle-based designer. She uses wall sconces and washers to create “art-like” lighting.

Tabletop lamps: Place these where you need concentrated lighting, Barney says. She likes lighter-colored shades with an open top so light shines through both ends.

Decorative lights: Think candles, string lights and more. Barney prefers an arrangement of pillar candles in an open fireplace or on a tabletop. Kashi Shikunova, partner and interior designer at [YAM Studios](#) in London, likes to put strands of string lights in glass bowls.

Switch out your lightbulbs

Shakoor suggests switching to lightbulbs that are between 2,700 Kelvin and 3,000 Kelvin. Bulbs in this range emit a soft white light that creates a pleasing, warm glow as opposed to the harsh hues we face from office lighting and screens, which can [affect the quality of your sleep](#). Avoid bulbs that look too orange, which can give off an antique look.

Consider your colors

Avoid dark wall colors if you don't have big windows: If you're trying to create the illusion of brightness, lighter colors on the walls are the way to go, experts say.

[Dark paint is in](#), but it's best avoided if the goal is to make a space brighter. Dark walls absorb light, which will make a room feel even darker if you don't have an abundance of natural light to begin with, Shakoor says. “You could paint a room black as long as you have appropriate lighting and floor-to-ceiling windows,” she says.

Don't make everything the same white: White is the go-to when creating a light, bright and open space, but a room that's entirely the same shade washes everything out. To avoid flatness, Shikunova layers shades of neutrals that complement and contrast with one another to create visual interest. “If you do everything in all white, it may be bright, but it's not necessarily warm,” she says. Texture and contrast bring warmth.

Use a reflective paint finish: Baker uses semi-gloss paints on the walls and ceiling or reflective and metallic wallpapers (she likes grass cloth) to bounce light around the room. “I love using at least an eggshell because it makes the walls more reflective,” she says.

Pick colors that work in low light: “Using a warm, neutral paint color is a great way to feel cozy but not overpowered with colors,” Baker says. She likes Benjamin Moore’s Edgecomb Gray, which works well in Seattle’s winters. Cooler-toned blues and greens, such as sage, interact well with low light and provide a subtle but pleasing hint of color without looking too dark, Barney says. Two of her go-to colors are [Sea Salt](#) and [North Star](#), both by Sherwin-Williams. Beyond the wall, Baker says, using lighter-colored woods and furnishings can also help the room seem lighter. “Darker will always absorb more light, and lighter will always appear brighter,” she says.

Paint the ceiling and wall the same color: Unless your space has crown molding, Shakoor suggests keeping the wall and ceiling the same color. It helps the space feel brighter and more open because it doesn’t define the end of the ceiling, she says. “It makes the ceiling feel like it’s going away,” Baker says.

Use mirrors, reflective items

You don’t want your space to [feel like a fun house](#), but mirrors and wall decor with brass or metal accents will help bounce light around the room and will create the illusion of a lighter space. In rooms with only one or two small windows, Shakoor suggests hanging a mirror on the wall opposite the window. Barney likes to cluster several small mirrors together or to include them in gallery walls.

Window treatments are an easy way to apply this idea: “Fabric with sheen will reflect light and feel less weighty,” Shakoor says. Just don’t pick anything too heavy, because it will block light. She likes cream, ivory, pale gray and rose. White works well here, too; it filters sunlight inside and creates a glowing effect.

Add some greenery

“Coming in and seeing a bright pop of life creates a good environment and adds visual texture,” says Janine Dowling, founder of Boston-based [Janine Dowling Interior Design](#). She suggests buying several small bouquets (she enjoys the selection and prices at Trader Joe’s) and spreading them around the areas of your home where you spend the most time. “Big Gerbera daisies are the happiest flowers I’ve ever seen,” she says. She also likes fiddle-leaf fig trees because they’re low-maintenance and do well in indirect light. “The big leaves have a lot of texture and would look great in a pretty pot with moss,” she says. And don’t think you need a dwarf tree because you live in a small space; Shakoor suggests picking a tree that stops about four inches below the ceiling to create drama.

If you don't want a live plant, you can still add a botanical element to the space. Shikunova likes to "bring the outdoors inside." One of her favorite holiday tips for residents short on space but not on holiday spirit: a "Christmas tree vase." Fill a tall vase with pine leaves, pine cones and branches and add decorative embellishments.