



WRITING SAMPLE

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The Best Light Bulb Types for Every Fixture in Your Home

The last time you shopped for a replacement light bulb, were you left paralyzed by the proliferation of new types of light bulbs in the lighting aisle? We explain the differences between CFL, LED and other bulbs, and the best application for each type

By Gretchen Heber

It's not your imagination: The light bulb section in your local hardware store is bigger than it used to be. Bulbs of every type, color, and shape line the shelves in a wide—and confusing—array of options, making it hard to find the right bulb for your needs. But once you understand bulb basics, choosing the right replacement bulb for your lamp or fixture can be a snap. We've put together the information you need to know about the many different types of light bulbs on the market these days so the next time you're faced with a burned-out bulb, you'll be prepared.

Light Bulb Lingo

Before you head out in search of a new bulb, get a grasp on the terminology manufacturers use to measure the input and output of certain types of light bulbs.

Watts indicate the amount of energy the bulb uses. Bulbs with lower wattage use less electricity and can therefore help keep the electricity bill down. Here, the age-old mantra holds true: Less is more.

Lumens indicate the amount of light the bulb emits. The number of lumens to look for depends on the room you're lighting, as some spaces (like the bathroom) could use a brighter bulb, and others (say, the bedroom) benefit from softer light. To calculate the optimal number of lumens, multiply the room's square footage by these rule-of-thumb figures:

- 7.5 lumens per square foot in hallways
- 15 lumens per square foot in bedrooms
- 35 lumens per square foot in dining rooms, kitchens, and offices
- 75 lumens per square foot in [bathrooms](#)

Typically, a standard 100-watt incandescent bulb emits approximately 1600 lumens. Newer types of light bulbs, however, require less power and emit just as much light. You may also see reference to [lux](#), which is a measurement of the amount of light that reaches a surface.

Bulb Type: Incandescent

Standard [incandescent bulbs](#)—known for being energy hogs—have experienced an energy-efficiency upgrade that began, for bulbs sold in California, in 2011 and became nationwide in 2012 as part of the [Energy Independence and Security Act of 2007](#). Common household light bulbs, which traditionally used between 40 and 100 watts before 2011, now use at least 27 percent less energy than they did back in the day while still producing comparable lumens. Because 100-watt incandescent bulbs stopped being manufactured in 2012, you're less likely to find them on shelves today and are more likely to be greeted with options of 30, 40, and 50 watts. Incandescent bulbs do not contain mercury, and they last an average of 1 year before needing to be replaced.

Best For: Use with dimmable light fixtures, [vanity lighting](#) (because incandescent light flatters skin), and low-voltage lighting such as night-lights.

Our Recommendation: [Philips 7-Watt C7 Replacement Light Bulb—Get a 4-pack at The Home Depot for \\$7.89](#)

The soft white light emitted by these bulbs makes them perfect for use in night-lights.

Bulb Type: Fluorescent

Fluorescent tube bulbs have been around for years. You're no doubt well acquainted with the long, cylindrical glass tubes you see in overhead lights in department stores, but you can also find circular and U-shaped [fluorescent](#) tubes to fit specialty fixtures. This particular type of light bulb uses less energy than incandescent bulbs, but it contains mercury vapor and a phosphor coating that converts UV light to visible light when turned on. Because these bulbs contain mercury, many communities have regulations for their disposal.

Best For: Bright lighting needs in your workshop.

Our Recommendation: [Philips 40-Watt T12 ALTO Fluorescent Tube—Get a 2-pack at The Home Depot for \\$10.87](#)

Use in kitchens or basements, or anywhere task light is called for.

Bulb Type: Compact Fluorescent

Compact fluorescent (CFL) bulbs—easily identified by their hallmark curlicue design—use a fraction of the wattage incandescent bulbs use. While good for reading and project work, the light they emit is relatively harsh and undesirable in vanity lighting, where they can add 10 years to your appearance. Like fluorescent tubes, CFLs contain mercury, so broken bulbs should be disposed of according to the [EPA's suggestions for cleanup](#). Note: Most CFLs don't work with dimmer switches and aren't particularly well suited for light fixtures you switch on and off frequently, as this habit can shorten their useful life.

Best For: Overhead lights, lamps, and task lights.

Our Recommendation: [EcoSmart Soft White Spiral CFL—Get a 4-pack at The Home Depot for \\$7.97](#)

Equivalent to a 60-watt incandescent bulb, this CFL emits 900 lumens of light.

Bulb Type: LED

[Light emitting diode \(LED\) bulbs](#) are the most energy efficient of all types of light bulbs. Though they were costly when they first hit the market, prices have dropped significantly since then. With lifespans that exceed those of most other bulbs and options that encompass a variety of colors as well as white, these bulbs offer the best bang for your buck. Early [LED bulbs](#) offered only directional lighting, but with recent advances, manufacturers are now offering LED bulbs that emit whole-room diffused lighting.

Best For: Just about anywhere you previously used incandescent bulbs.

Our Recommendation: [Philips A19 Daylight LED bulbs—Get a 16-pack at The Home Depot for \\$7.97](#)

Use these energy-saving LEDs to replace the bulbs in your overhead lights, wall sconces, or table lamps.

Bulb Type: Halogen and Xenon

Halogen bulbs use 25 to 80 percent less energy than incandescent bulbs, but they still use more than CFLs and LEDs. The white light they emit brings out vibrant tones in furnishings and decor. Halogen bulbs come the closest to natural daylight, but as they get extremely hot, be sure not to use them in any [lamp](#) or fixture that young children can reach. A variation on halogen, xenon bulbs cast the same clear white light yet remain cooler to the touch than standard halogen bulbs, making xenon safer for use in table lamps.

Best For: Exterior floodlights, hanging pendant lights, and accent lighting.

Our Recommendation: [Feit Electric 50-watt Bi-Pin Dimmable 12-Volt Halogen Light Bulb—Get a 3-pack at The Home Depot for \\$10.88](#)

This dimmable, 500-lumen bulb is perfect for track and recessed lighting.

Bulb Type: Wi-Fi Capable

Strictly in the realm of “specialty bulbs,” Wi-Fi-capable LED bulbs fit ordinary lamps and fixtures but give you the ability to either program the bulbs to turn on at preset times or control them remotely from your smartphone or tablet. Read the fine print before you mistakenly buy one that doesn’t work with your mobile device; some bulbs are strictly Apple- or Android-compatible.

Best For: Remote operation of overhead lights or lamps that you typically set to stay on before you leave for vacation.

Our Recommendation: [Flux WiFi Smart LED Light Bulb—Get it on Amazon for \\$30.95](#)

For use with both Apple and Android devices, this bulb offers precise control of brightness and color.

Final Thoughts

While it may require a few more minutes in the light bulb aisle, taking the time to carefully consider the many options means you will get precisely the right bulb for your needs. You might opt for old-standby incandescent bulbs or take your lighting to a new level with smart LEDs.

FAQs About Light Bulb Types

Ready to dazzle friends at your next dinner party with your vast knowledge of types of light bulbs? Be sure to add these frequently asked questions and answers to your arsenal before you

send out the invitations. With just a bit more intel, you'll be the smartest person at the table.

Q. What is the most common household light bulb?

Most households utilize a number of LED screw-type bulbs as well as a good number of smaller-wattage incandescent light bulbs.

Q. What is the difference between different types of light bulbs?

The light emitted from various types of light bulbs is generated from different sources. In incandescent bulbs, for example, heat passes through a filament, heating it to a temperature that produces light. With LEDs, current passes through a semiconductor to produce light.

Q. How many light bulb types are there?

You'll find numerous light bulb types at your local hardware store, including incandescent, fluorescent, compact fluorescent, LED, halogen, and xenon. Less common types include high-pressure sodium and metal halide.

Q. What are the different types of light bulb bases?

With screw-type light bulb bases, you'll find a wide range of sizes. Moving on to other types of bases, there are single- and dual-pin bases, twist and lock bases, wedge bases, bayonet bases, and numerous specialty bases.