Christmas lights

Christmas lights (also known as fairy lights) are lights used for decoration in celebration of [Christmas](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christmas), often on display throughout the [Christmas season](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christmas_and_holiday_season) including [Advent](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Advent) and [Christmastide](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christmastide). The custom goes back to when Christmas trees were decorated with [candles](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Candle), which [symbolized](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christian_symbol) Christ being the [light of the world](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Light_of_the_world). This custom was borrowed from pagan yule rituals that celebrate the return of the light of the sun as the days grow longer after solstice: the evergreen trees symbolising the renewal and continuance of life in dark times. The Christmas trees were brought by Christians into their homes in [early modern Germany](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Early_modern_Germany).

Christmas trees displayed publicly and illuminated with electric lights became popular in the early 20th century. By the mid-20th century, it became customary to display strings of electric lights along streets and on buildings; Christmas decorations detached from the Christmas tree itself. In the United States, it became popular to outline private homes with such Christmas lights in [tract housing](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tract_housing) beginning in the 1960s. By the late 20th century, the custom had also been adopted in other nations, including outside the Western world, notably in [Japan](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Japan) and [Hong Kong](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hong_Kong). Throughout [Christendom](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christendom).

In many countries, Christmas lights, as well as other [Christmas decorations](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christmas_decoration), are traditionally erected on or around the [first day](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Advent_Sunday) of [Advent](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Advent). In the Western Christian world, the two traditional days when Christmas lights are removed are [Twelfth Night](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Twelfth_Night_(holiday)) and [Candlemas](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Candlemas), the latter of which ends the [Christmas-Epiphany season](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Epiphanytide) in some [denominations](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christian_denominations). Leaving the decorations up beyond Candlemas is historically considered to be inauspicious.

A picture containing sky, outdoor, building, water

Description automatically generated

[Trafalgar Square Christmas Tree](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trafalgar_Square_Christmas_tree" \o "Trafalgar Square Christmas tree) with lights in [London](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/London), [England](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/England)

History

The [Christmas tree](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christmas_tree) was adopted in upper-class homes in [18th-century Germany](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/18th-century_Germany), where it was occasionally decorated with [candles](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Candle), which at the time was a comparatively expensive light source. Candles for the tree were glued with melted wax to a tree branch or attached by pins. Around 1890, candleholders were first used for Christmas candles. Between 1902 and 1914, small [lanterns](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lanterns) and glass balls to hold the candles started to be used. Early electric Christmas lights were introduced with [electrification](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Electrification), beginning in the 1880s.

The illuminated Christmas tree became established in the UK during [Queen Victoria's](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Queen_Victoria) reign, and through emigration spread to North America and Australia. In her journal for Christmas Eve 1832, the 13-year-old princess wrote, "After dinner… we then went into the drawing-room near the dining-room. There were two large round tables on which were placed two [trees](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christmas_tree#18th_and_19th_centuries) hung with lights and sugar ornaments. All the [presents](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Presents) being placed round the trees". Until the availability of inexpensive electrical power in the early 20th century, miniature candles were commonly (and in some cultures still are) used.

In the UK, electric Christmas lights are generally known as fairy lights. In 1881, the [Savoy Theatre](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Savoy_Theatre), London was the first building in the world to be lit entirely by electricity. [Sir Joseph Swan](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sir_Joseph_Swan), pioneer of the [incandescent light bulb](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Incandescent_light_bulb), supplied about 1,200 Swan incandescent lamps, and a year later, the Savoy owner [Richard D'Oyly Carte](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_D%27Oyly_Carte) equipped the principal fairies with miniature lighting supplied by the Swan United Electric Lamp Company, for the opening night of the [Gilbert and Sullivan](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gilbert_and_Sullivan) opera [Iolanthe](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iolanthe) on 25 November 1882. The term 'fairy lights', describing 'a small coloured light used in illuminations' had already entered English: its usage for a string of electrically powered Christmas lights has been common in the UK ever since.

The first known electrically illuminated Christmas tree was the creation of [Edward H. Johnson](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edward_H._Johnson), an associate of inventor [Thomas Edison](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas_Edison). While he was vice president of the [Edison Electric Light Company](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edison_Electric_Light_Company), a predecessor of today's [Con Edison](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Con_Edison) [electric utility](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Electric_utility), he had Christmas tree light bulbs especially made for him. He proudly displayed his Christmas tree, which was hand-[wired](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wire) with 80 red, white and blue electric [incandescent light bulbs](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Incandescent_light_bulb) the size of walnuts, on December 22, 1882 at his home on Fifth Avenue in [New York City](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_York_City). Local newspapers ignored the story, seeing it as a [publicity stunt](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Publicity_stunt). However, it was published by a [Detroit](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Detroit) newspaper reporter, and Johnson has become widely regarded as the [Father of Electric Christmas Tree Lights](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_people_known_as_the_father_or_mother_of_something). By 1900, businesses started stringing up Christmas lights behind their windows. Christmas lights were too expensive for the average person; as such, electric Christmas lights did not become the majority replacement for candles until 1930.

In 1895, US President [Grover Cleveland](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grover_Cleveland) sponsored the first electrically-lit Christmas tree in the [White House](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/White_House). It was a huge specimen, featuring over a hundred multi-coloured lights. The first commercially-produced Christmas tree lamps were manufactured in strings of multiples of eight sockets by the [General Electric Co.](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/General_Electric_Company) of [Harrison, New Jersey](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harrison,_New_Jersey). Each socket took a miniature two-[candela](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Candela) carbon-filament lamp.

From that point on, electrically illuminated Christmas trees (only indoors) grew with mounting enthusiasm in the US and elsewhere. [San Diego](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/San_Diego) in 1904, [Appleton, Wisconsin](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Appleton,_Wisconsin) in 1909, and [New York City](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_York_City) in 1912 were the first recorded instances of the use of Christmas lights outside. [McAdenville, North Carolina](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/McAdenville,_North_Carolina) claims to have been the first in 1956. The [Library of Congress](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Library_of_Congress) credits the town for inventing "the tradition of decorating evergreen trees with Christmas lights dates back to 1956 when the McAdenville Men's Club conceived of the idea of decorating a few trees around the McAdenville Community Centre." However, the [Rockefeller Centre Christmas Tree](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rockefeller_Center_Christmas_Tree) has had "lights" since 1931, but did not have real electric lights until 1956. Furthermore, Philadelphia's Christmas Light Show and Disney's Christmas Tree also began in 1956. Though [General Electric](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/General_Electric) sponsored community lighting competitions during the 1920s, it would take until the mid-1950s for the use of such lights to be adopted by average households.

Christmas lights found use in places other than Christmas trees. By 1919, city electrician John Malpiede began decorating the new [Civic Centre Park](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Civic_Center,_Denver) in [Denver, Colorado](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Denver,_Colorado), eventually expanding the display to the park's Greek Amphitheatre and later to the adjacent new Denver City and County Building - City Hall upon its completion in 1932.  Soon, strings of lights adorned mantles and doorways inside homes, and ran along the rafters, roof lines, and porch railings of homes and businesses. In recent times, many city skyscrapers are decorated with long mostly-vertical strings of a common theme, and are activated simultaneously in [Grand Illumination](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grand_Illumination) ceremonies.

In 1963, a boycott of Christmas lights was done in [Greenville, North Carolina](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Greenville,_North_Carolina) to protest the segregation that kept blacks from being employed by downtown businesses in Greenville, during the Christmas sales season. Known as the [Black Christmas (boycott)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Black_Christmas_(boycott)) or "Christmas Sacrifice", it was an effective way to protest the cultural and fiscal segregation in the town with 33% black population. Light decorations in the homes, on the Christmas trees, or outside the house were not shown, and only six houses in the black community broke the boycott that Christmas.

In 1973 during an oil shortage triggered by an embargo by the Organization of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries (later OPEC) President Nixon asked Americans not to put up Christmas lights to conserve energy use. Many Americans complied, and there were fewer displays that year.

In the mid-2000s, the video of the home of [Carson Williams](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carson_Williams) was widely distributed on the internet as a [viral video](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Viral_video). It garnered national attention in 2005 from The Today Show on NBC, [Inside Edition](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Inside_Edition) and the CBS Evening News and was featured in a Miller television commercial. Williams turned his hobby into a commercial venture and was commissioned to scale up his vision to a scale of 250,000 lights at a Denver shopping centre, as well as displays in parks and zoos.