Five Ways to Win the Christmas Decorating Contest in Your Neighborhood This Year

It’s time for the annual battle of the bulbs in your neighborhood, and this year, you’re keen to win. If you’ve already armed yourself with hammer, nails and enough cash to buy a few thousand lights, then you’re ready for some tips to help you win the Christmas decorating contest in your neighborhood this season.

1) Light Up Your Christmas

Anyone who has seen the movie “National Lampoon’s Christmas Vacation” knows that you can never have too many lights on your house. For the ultimate light fest, cover your roof with vertical or horizontal light strands, in your choice of solid or multi colors. This is particularly effective if you have a slanting, A-frame type of roof. Just be aware that this is the type of do-it-yourself project that’s only doable if you have a head for heights; otherwise, hire someone to do your roof decorating. Don’t forget to string plenty of lights along the eaves of the roof as well.

After you’ve finished the roof, come up with a lighting pattern for the rest of your home. It helps to draw a diagram first so that you can indicate exactly where and how you want to string your lights. Start with window and door frames, and then give full vent to your creativity. You can string lights horizontally, vertically or even diagonally across the length and width of the house, or you can opt for other geometric patterns.

Once the house is done — and make sure you included your front porch and stairs, if you have any — then it’s time to turn your attention to the trees and bushes in your yard. Of course, any tree outside is fair game to being turned into an on-the-spot Christmas tree; just drape it with strands of lights in complementary colors. Drape your bushes as well, and use as many lights as you can afford. As with the house, too many lights are never enough.

If your lawn is relatively bare of trees or bushes, opt instead for walkway luminarias or lanterns in colorful Christmas shapes and colors.

Make sure that you choose lights that are of the multi-function twinkle variety, because you’ll want to synchronize them to our next suggestion.

2) Music

Thanks to new technologies, today’s most fabulous, award-winning Christmas houses all have music synchronized to their lighting displays. You don’t have to be a tech guru to cover your yard in musical glory, because Light-O-Rama and Microsoft both offer software that does all the work for you. You might also want to consider GE’s Lights and Sounds of Christmas, a plug and play music/lighting system that will give you preselected music synchronized to pre-programmed lights. If you just want to play music without synchronizing your lighting, any of the Mannheim Steamroller or Trans-Siberian Orchestra Christmas albums are particularly effective when paired with outdoor displays.

3) Animated Displays

No award-winning outdoor display is complete without a huge assortment of animated characters. Whether you’re into Rudolph, Charlie Brown, Snoopy and Sesame Street figures, or whether you prefer generic Christmas characters such as elves, carol singers and and reindeer, you’ll have a ball choosing the most entertaining characters and positioning them in creative, imaginative ways on your lawn. For example, if you’re including a herd of reindeer, you can create a lovely reindeer pool by draping blue and crystal lights in a circle in front of your deer display.

4) Stationary Displays

Not all of your figures need to be animated; in fact, it can prove to be too distracting if all of your display characters are moving. You’ll want to provide visual contrast and interest by installing a number of stationary characters as well.

You can also save a section for a large-scale Nativity display that can include animals, angels, shepherds, wise men and the Holy Family in a life-size manger.

5) Showcase Your Santa

Other than your light display, the main showcase of your outdoor display should be, of course, Santa Claus. Choose a fabulous, larger-than-life Santa. If you decide to put him on your roof, then you might want to go with a lightweight, inflatable model. Of course, you’ll have to install reindeer and an oversized, present-filled sleigh nearby for Santa to hop into when he’s finished at your house.

This is going to be a lot of work for one person, so be sure to bring in as much help as you can. If you’re on a budget, you can enlist friends and family members with offers of dinner, or you can promise to do odd jobs for them to pay them back. By implementing these ideas and adding a touch of creative whimsy, you’re sure to take the honors at this year’s neighborhood Christmas decorating contest.