

LEDs: Here to Stay, or Go Away?

Can these little lights save big on energy and replacement costs, and burn brightly too?

We're in an age of quick obsolescence, when more and more staples of our recent lives become antiques faster than we could have imagined. Typewriters, paper books, floppy discs and other technologies seem to go as fast as they came.

For a while, incandescent light bulbs have been on the cusp of that same transition, primarily in terms of saving energy. Newer compact fluorescent (CFL) bulbs burned cooler and more efficiently, but never caught on as a mainstream replacement for traditional lighting. Even with the U.S.'s impending ban on selling incandescent bulbs, people largely haven't transitioned, but rather stocked up on the old technology.

Now CFLs appear to have missed their chance, as LED technology has not only conquered its shortcomings, but have surpassed all the competition. And people are starting to notice, according to John Joyce, owner and president of John J. Contracting Corporation in Huntington Station, New York.

"LEDs have pretty much caught up with traditional lighting in every regard," says Joyce, a graduate of Wilson Technological Center and a 15-year veteran of the business.

The huge advantage to LED lighting is how much you'll save in energy and materials. LEDs use 90 percent less electricity than incandescent, and the bulbs last as much as 50 times as long — so long that you may never need to replace a light before moving. "Every house is different depending on how often you use the lights, but on average you'll get 2,500 hours out of a standard bulb, which is about six months," Joyce says. "An LED bulb will run for approximately 25 years. It's also a big energy savings. You're going to pay a little more money for it up front, but in the long term you'll see huge benefits on your electric bill."

LED lighting didn't look promising in the technology's early days because it was inflexible and the illumination was harsh. All that has changed. The bulbs can now be dimmed, installed in different strengths,

and even used in programmable lighting.

They're also available in different colors, which solves the biggest early complaint about LEDs. "When they first came out, they were just a very bright light, like a fluorescent, and people didn't like that," Joyce says. "Now they've been changing the illumination and colors so you can get more of a natural yellowish light."

Moreover, LED lighting is compact and burns cool to the touch, which means they can be installed just about anywhere and in just about any way the creative mind can imagine. They're becoming so popular that Joyce says most of his new construction includes LEDs, especially for Energy



Star-compliant homes.

Still, you don't need to build a new house to reap the advantages — you can convert any home to LED technology pretty easily. "We now have LED lights that you can switch over right in the fixture, just by changing the actual socket," Joyce says. "It just unscrews and the new LED sockets go right in. You can change over your whole house."

And that can change your wallet and your carbon footprint all in one easy step. ♦

