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Osram Lightify Starter Kit review: Osram's smart lights dial in on quality

With a killer color-tuning feature that you won't get from Philips Hue Lux or Belkin WeMo, Osram's new smart bulbs look like a smart play.

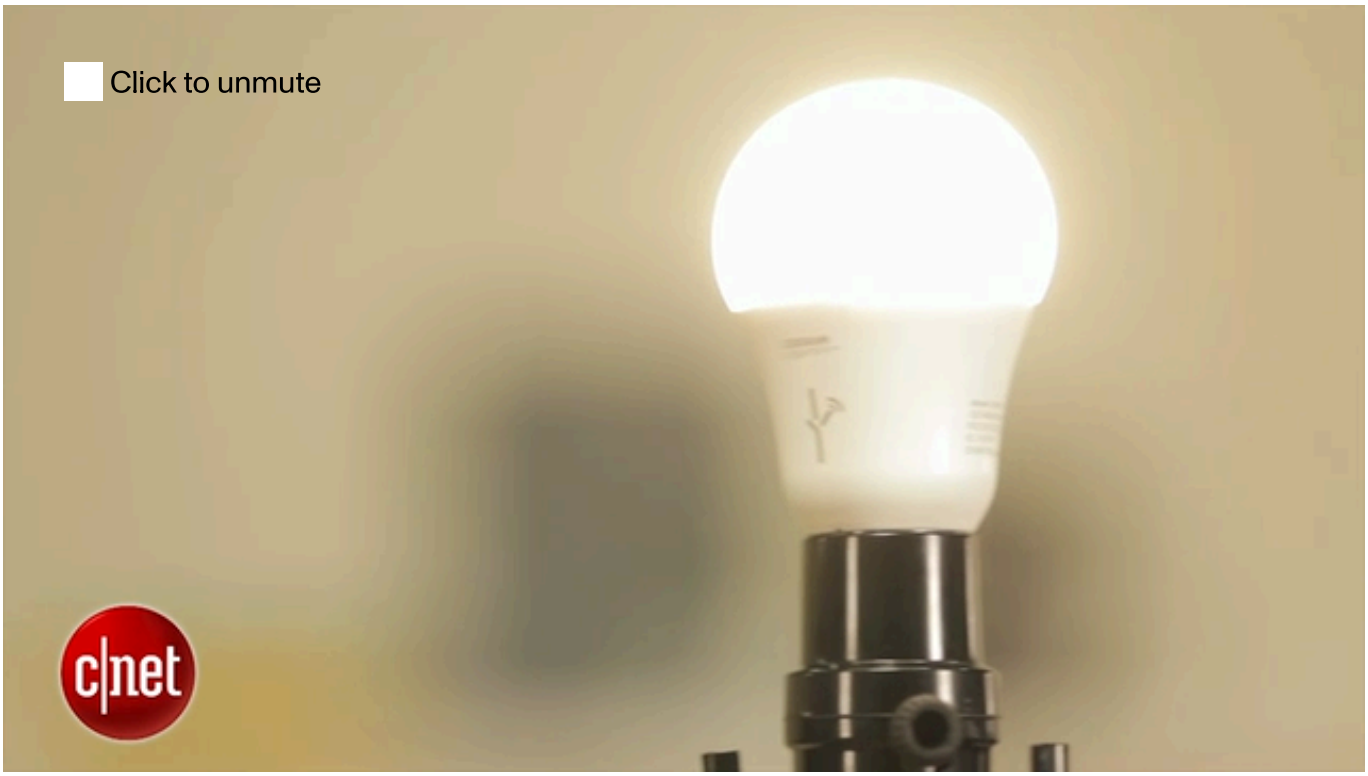


Ry Crist

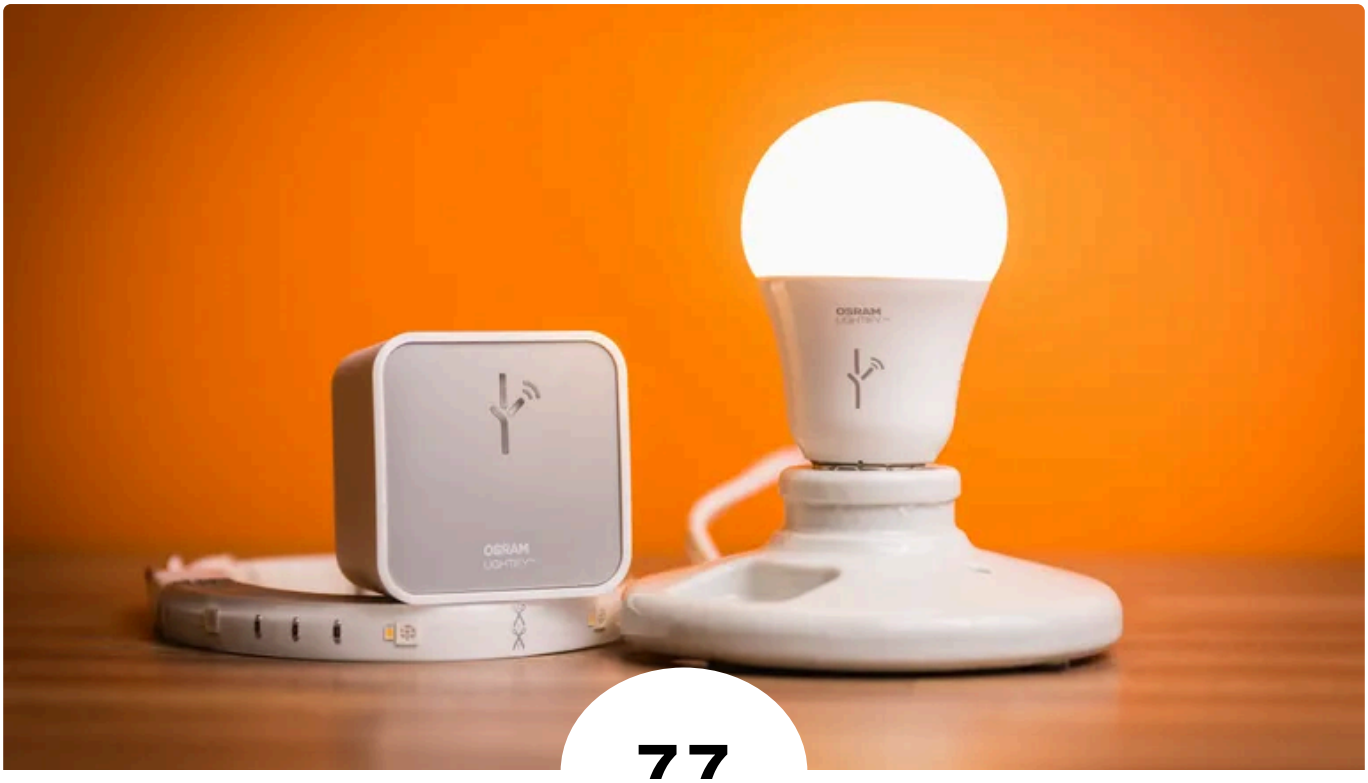
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EDITOR'S NOTE, 7/26/16, 12:05 PM EST: Updated to include information about potential security vulnerabilities with products in Osram's Lightify lineup, along with comment from Osram.



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Osram Lightify Starter Kit

THE GOOD

Osram's tunable Lightify LEDs offer smart color-temperature controls that you won't find with Belkin WeMo or Philips Hue Lux bulbs. They're also highly efficient, and they work with WeMo, too.

THE BAD

Osram can't offer a connected-lighting platform or app that's as well-developed as Philips, and its LEDs cost twice as much as smart bulbs from Cree and GE.

THE BOTTOM LINE

These aren't the cheapest smart bulbs you can buy, but Osram's Lightify LED Starter Kit is more affordable than Philips or Belkin's, and arguably more feature-rich, too. As a legitimate competitor, it deserves consideration.

Osram's LEDs impressed me with strong performance in the 40 and 60W replacement categories. This year, the brand is adding smart bulbs to its lighting lineup. Dubbed "Lightify," the new product line offers a variety of different LEDs with Zigbee radios built right in. Buy the $60 starter kit, and you'll get the plug-in Gateway along with a "color tunable" smart bulb capable of dialing into the specific warm-to-cool color temperature of your choosing (pricing and availability of that starter kit outside of the US is not yet finalized, but the price converts roughly to about £40, or a little over AU$75).

At about $30 for an individual bulb (about £20, AU$40), the tunable Lightify LEDs cost more than twice as much as the GE Link LED or the Cree Connected LED , but those bulbs don't have control apps of their own like Osram does, and they aren't color tunable, either. Also not color tunable:

Philips Hue Lux LEDs and Belkin WeMo LEDs , both of which cost more to get started with than Lightify. What's more, Lightify LEDs are directly compatible with WeMo, opening the door for additional automation controls.

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All of that positions Osram in a bit of a smart-lighting sweet spot, making the Lightify kit an attractive starting point for anyone looking to automate their home lighting.

Lightify your smart home with Osram's new LEDs (pictures)





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Performance and design

First things first: smart LEDs need to be decent light bulbs. It's nice having your lights turn on automatically in the morning, but much less so if the light quality isn't great.

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Osram has a pretty good track record here in our test lab, so I was optimistic about the Lightify LEDs. For the most part, they didn't disappoint. Testing the bulbs out in our integrating sphere, we clocked the brightness at about 850 lumens -- comfortably north of the stated 805 lumens, and plenty bright for a 60W replacement.

Smart LEDs

	Osram Lightify Tunable LED	Belkin WeMo LED	Philips Hue Lux LED	Connected by TCP LED	Cree Connected LED	GE Link LED
Lumens (measured / stated)	848 / 805	829 / 800	733 / 750	840 / 800	872 / 815	855 / 800
Watts	9.5	9.5	9	11	11.5	11
Efficiency (lumens per watt)	89	87	81	76	76	78
Color tunable	Yes	No	No	No	No	No
Color temperature (measured / stated)	2,680K - 5,273K / 2,700K - 6,500K	3,058K / 3,000K	2,640K / 2,700K	2,603K / 2,700K	2,696K / 2,700K	2,830K / 2,700K
Additional color temperatures (price difference)	No	No	No	5,000K (-$1)	No	No
Color rendering score	78 - 83	88	79	80	80	90
Dimmable range	5.4 - 100%	3.8 - 100%	0.5 - 100%	1.2 - 100%	7.8 - 100%	10.2 - 100%
Lifespan	20,000 hours	25,000 hours	25,000 hours	25,000 hours	25,000 hours	25,000 hours
Weight	4.75 oz.	2.75 oz.	4.60 oz.	6.05 oz.	1.90 oz.	6.20 oz.
Third party compatibility	WeMo Link, Wink	None	SmartThings, Revolv, Staples Connect, IFTTT	Wink	Wink, Hue Bridge, SmartThings	Wink, Hue Bridge, SmartThings
Remote (additional cost)	No	No	Yes ($60)	Yes ($20)	No	No
Warranty	2 years	2 years	2 years	3 years	3 years	2 years
Starter kit price	$60	$100	$100	$50	N/A	$80

	Osram Lightify Tunable LED	Belkin WeMo LED	Philips Hue Lux LED	Connected by TCP LED	Cree Connected LED	GE Link LED
Bulbs per kit	1	2	2	2	N/A	2
Price per bulb	$33	$30	$30	$20	$15	$15

That's an especially impressive number given that each bulb only draws 9.5 watts. Do the math, and you'll find that each Lightify LED is putting out almost 90 lumens per watt -- good enough to edge out our previous efficiency winner in the smart LED category, the Belkin WeMo LED. It's also quite a bit better than the Philips Hue Lux LED, which puts out less than 750 lumens from a 9-watt power draw.

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Turning to color temperature, the Lightify LED comes in at a nice, accurate 2,680K when set to a target of 2,700K. That accuracy diminishes a bit at the upper end of the scale, though. Cranking to a max temperature of 6,500K gave us light that actually came in at 5,273K. That's still plenty hot, with that bluish-white "daylight" quality you're probably looking for, but still, it's off the mark.

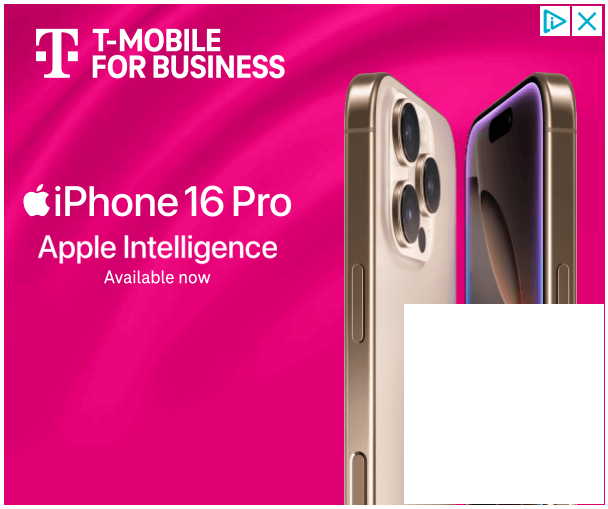
As for color rendering, the Lightify LED registers a pretty pedestrian score of 78 when set to 2,700K. Dial the color temperature up, however, and the CRI inches up, too, jumping as high as 83 at that 6,500K setting. That makes sense -- yellow tones are often what end up compromising the color rendering score in LEDs, and they drop away when you raise the color temperature.



Tyler Lizenby/CNET

You can dim the Lightify LEDs on your smartphone or tablet, though using them with actual dimmer switches is ill-advised, since the two separate dimming mechanisms can clash, causing the bulb to flicker and strobe. The same can be said of pretty much any smart bulb, though.

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In Osram's case, the Lightify LEDs will dim down to 5.4 percent brightness at minimum settings. That's a decent result, though it isn't as good as Philips Hue Lux bulbs, which will dim smoothly down to a very impressive 0.8 percent of their maximum brightness. Belkin WeMo LEDs will also dim down a bit lower than Osram, as will Connected by TCP LEDs .

One other small performance complaint: the Lightify LEDs don't turn on instantly. Flick the switch, and you might notice about a half second pause before the light actually shines. It's a small quibble, but it might be enough of one to annoy lighting sticklers.



Tyler Lizenby/CNET

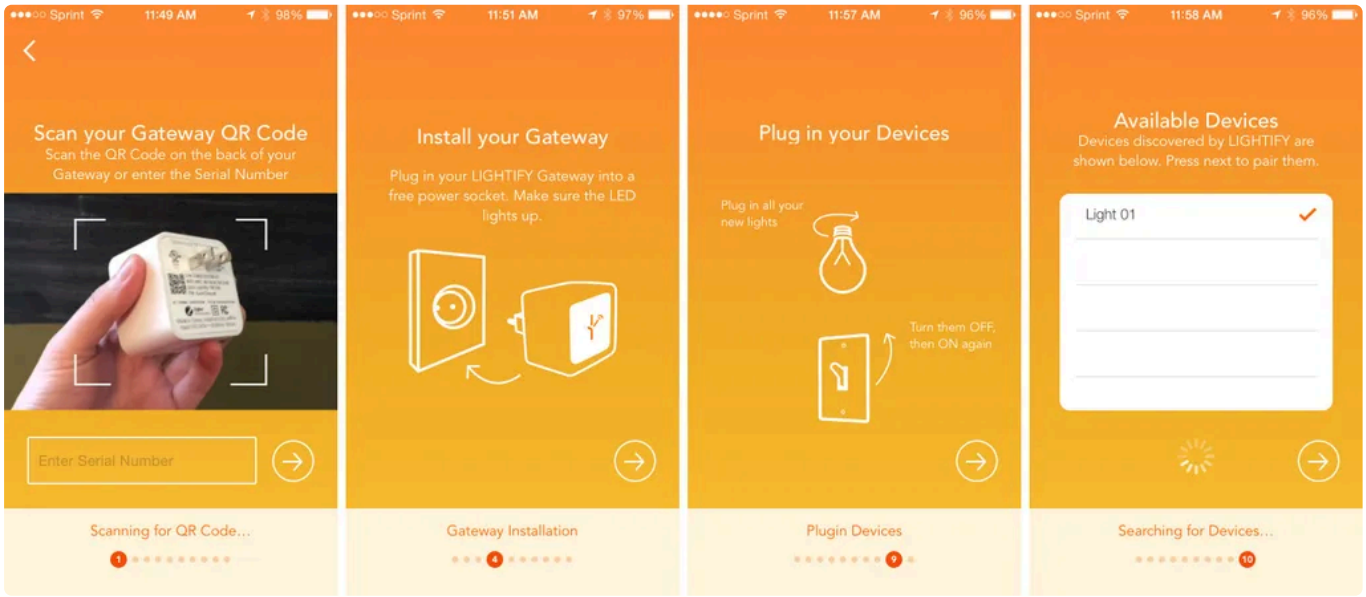
Usability and features

I spent a few days testing the Lightify kit out in my apartment, and came away satisfied with how it works. Getting things up and running only took me a few minutes, and I appreciated that Osram's app provided clear, step-by-step instructions as I paired everything up.

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You'll start by scanning a QR code on the back of the Gateway to let the app know what it's looking for. Then after plugging the thing in, it'll begin broadcasting a Wi-Fi signal. Join the Lightify network using the model-specific password Osram provides, then select your home network to sync things up.



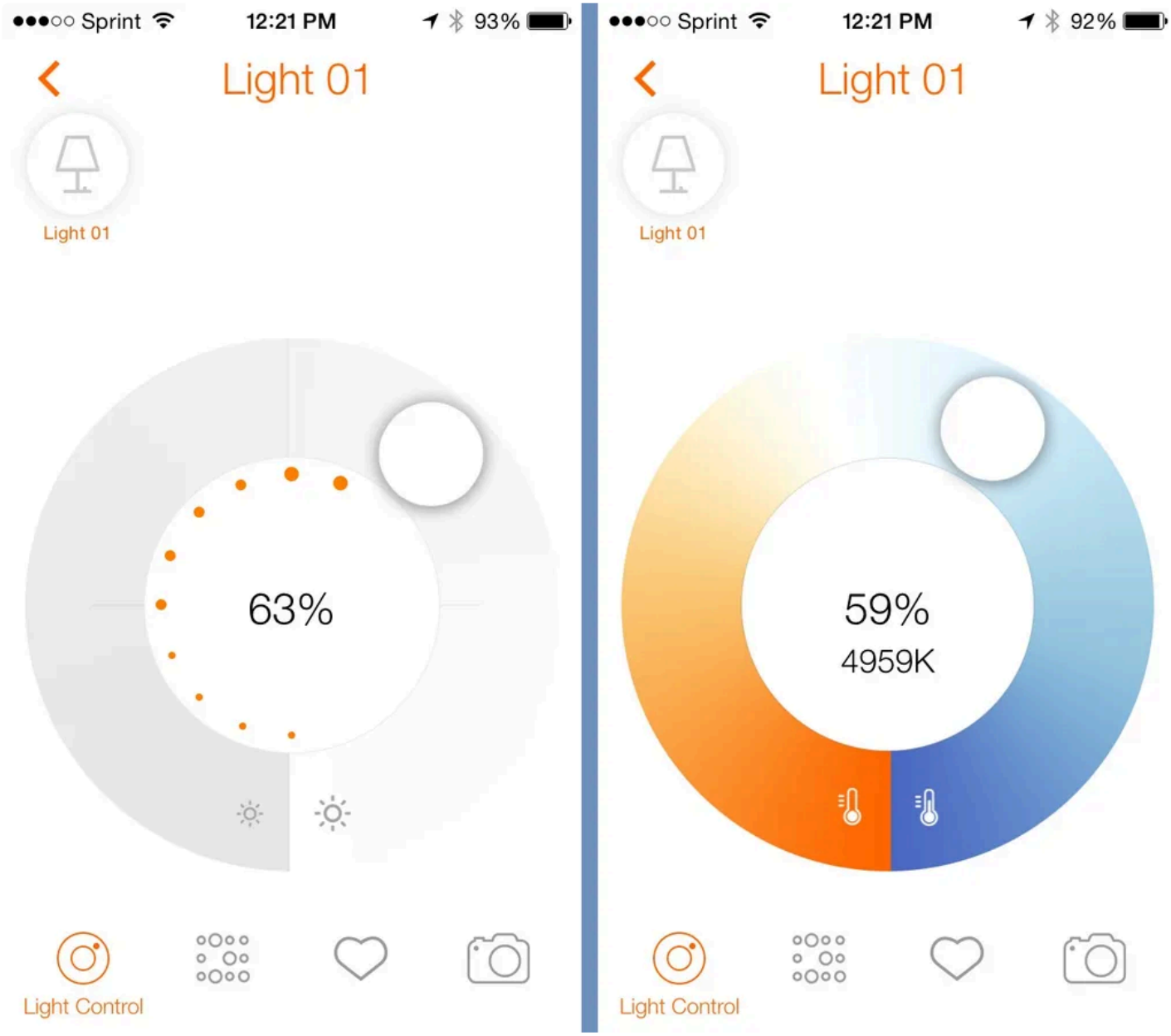
Osram's app does a good job of walking you through the setup process.

Screenshots by Ry Crist/CNET

With the Gateway up and running, it's a breeze to add new lights to the system. That was a relief, as other systems -- most notably Wink -- have proven to be a bit finicky when pairing certain devices. With Osram, everything paired on the

first try, even after deleting and re-pairing a few times.

The Lightify app offers remote management of each LED you incorporate into your system, with rotary dial-style controls for both brightness and color temperature. Add an RGB, color-changing light to your system, like the $70 Flex Strip accessory, and you'll also find a color selector similar to the one Philips Hue uses.



You'll be able to control brightness and color temperature in the Osram app, and also schedule automated lighting changes.

Screenshots by Ry Crist/CNET

In addition to remote controls, you'll also be able to program automated lighting changes. For basic on/off scheduling, it's an easy process -- just set the on time, the off time, and which bulb or group of bulbs you want to automate. If you want to schedule specific changes in brightness, color, or color temperature, you'll have to save the desired state of the lights as a "Scene," and then schedule a time for that Scene to activate.

It's worth knowing that security researchers have reported a number of vulnerabilities with the way Lightify products communicate with each other, including a flaw that could potentially allow a hacker to inject JavaScript and web-based HTML code into Osram's web interface. That could potentially lead to browser-based attacks on your network, including the theft of your wireless password and other sensitive data.

I asked Osram about the situation, and received the following comment from Jacqueline Boas, Osram America's head of communications and brand: "Osram agreed to security testing on existing Lightify products by Security researchers from Rapid7. Since being notified about the vulnerabilities identified by Rapid7, Osram has taken actions to analyze, validate and implement a risk-based remediation strategy, and the majority of vulnerabilities will be patched in the next version update, currently planned for release in August.

"Rapid7 security researchers also highlighted certain vulnerabilities within the ZigBee protocol, which are unfortunately not in Osram's area of influence. Osram is in ongoing coordination with the ZigBee Alliance in relation to known and newly discovered vulnerabilities."

I've reached out to the ZigBee Alliance for an update on these efforts, and will update this review if and when I receive one.

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I also tested the Lightify bulbs out using WeMo, and found that they synced up with the WeMo Link as promised. Color-tunability controls haven't been incorporated into WeMo's app just yet, but I imagine they'll get there soon, although we're also still waiting for a long-promised WeMo LED IFTTT channel. If Belkin finally delivers on those IFTTT lighting controls, it stands to reason that they'd extend to any bulb run through the WeMo Link -- including Lightify LEDs.

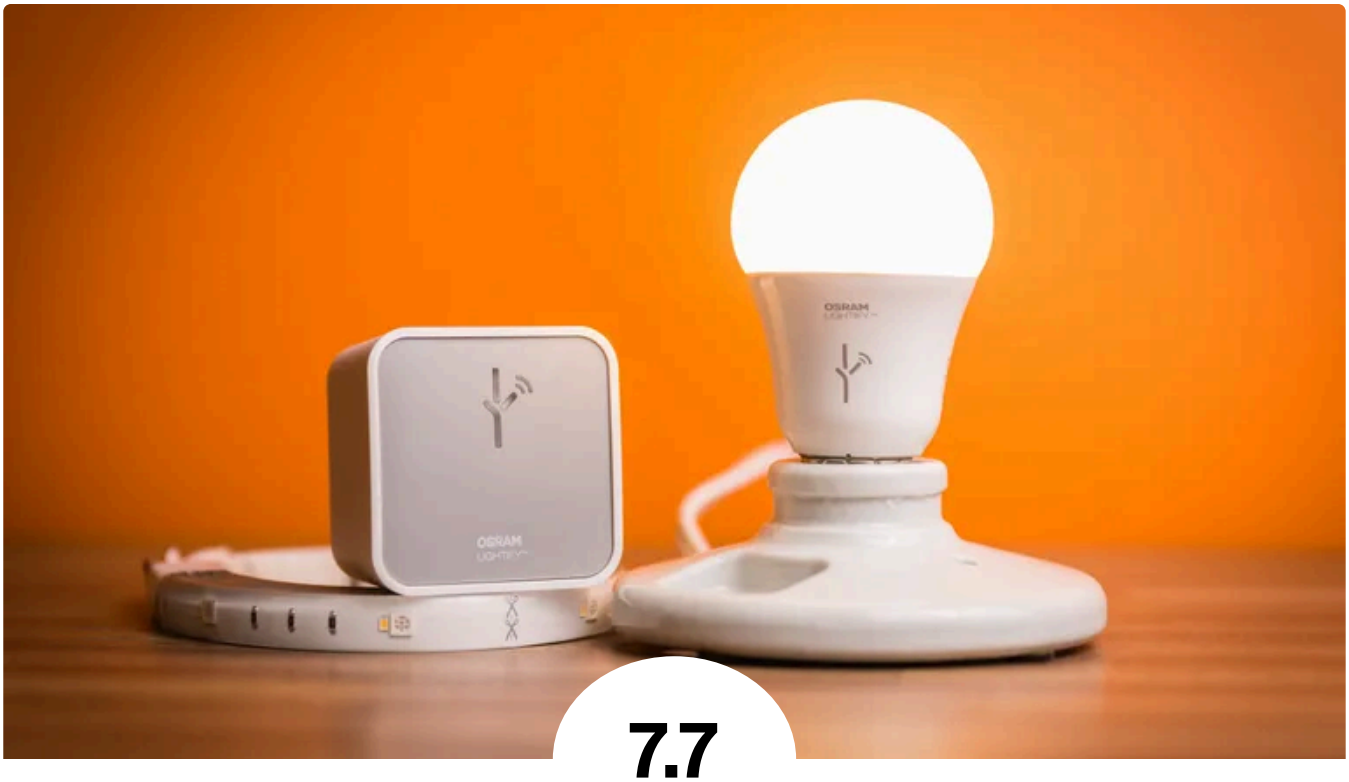
Another back door to IFTTT compatibility might be the Philips Hue Bridge, which already supports third-party Zigbee bulbs from GE and Cree, and extends the power of its dedicated IFTTT channel to those bulbs, too. A tweet from Hue's team suggests that Osram bulbs have been tested for compatibility with the Hue Bridge, but I was unable to get any of the Lightify products to pair when I tried it out. It's also worth noting that the Hue Bridge isn't sold on its own -- to get one, you'll have to find one secondhand, or purchase an entire Hue or Hue Lux starter kit.



Tyler Lizenby/CNET

The verdict

Last year, I felt that Philips missed an opportunity by not making the Hue Lux LEDs color tunable. Now, Osram's beaten them to the punch, with tunable Lightify LEDs set to sell for roughly the same price. Philips is still ahead in terms of platform development and third-party support (the importance of which really can't be overstated), and cheaper smart bulbs from Cree and GE lead the way in terms of affordability. The Lightify LEDs are still a strong enough alternative to merit a look -- though I'd wait to see how Osram addresses the recent security concerns before buying in.



7.7

Osram Lightify Starter Kit

SCORE BREAKDOWN

Features	**9**
Usability	**7**
Design	**6**
Performance	**9**

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