It's human to want light and warmth. Our pagan ancestors had a calendar of fire festivals, and God's first recorded words, according to the Hebrew Bible, were: "Let there be light." Night belongs to the dark side, literally and metaphorically: ghosts, scary monsters, robbers, the unknown. Electricity's triumph over the night keeps us safer as well as busier.

But whatever extends the day loses us the dark.
We now live in a fast-moving, fully lit world where night still happens, but is optional to experience. Our 24/7 culture has phased out the night. In fact we treat the night like failed daylight. Yet slowness and silence – the different rhythm of the night – are a necessary correction to the day.

I think we should stop being night-resisters, and learn to celebrate the changes of the seasons, and realign ourselves to autumn and winter, not just turn up the heating, leave the lights on and moan a lot.

Night and dark are good for us. As the nights lengthen, it's time to reopen the dreaming space. Have you ever spent an evening without electric light?

It doesn't matter whether you are in the city or the country, as long as you can control your own little pod. Make it a weekend, get in plenty of candles, and lay the fire if you have one. Prepare dinner ahead, and plan a walk so that you will be heading for home in that lovely liminal time where light and dark are hinged against each other.

City or country, that sundown hour is strange and exhilarating, as ordinary spatial relations are altered: trees rear up in their own shadows, buildings bulk out, pavements stretch forward, the red wrapper of brake lights turns a road into a lava flow.

Inside, the lights are going on. Outside, it's getting dark. You, as a dark shape in a darkening world, want to hold that intimacy, just for one night. Go home. Leave the lights off.

We have all experienced negative darkness – those long stretches of the night when we can't sleep, and worry about everything, and so we know that "dark time" can seem interminably long, compared with daytime. Yet this slowing of time can be the most relaxing and beautiful experience. Spending the evening in candlelight, and maybe by the fire – with no TV – talking, telling stories, letting the lit-up world go by without us, expands the hours, and alters the thoughts and conversations we have.

I have noticed that when all the lights are on, people tend to talk about what they are doing – their outer lives. Sitting round in candlelight or firelight, people start to talk about how they are feeling – their inner lives. They speak subjectively, they argue less, there are longer pauses.

To sit alone without any electric light is curiously creative. I have my best ideas at dawn or at nightfall, but not if I switch on the lights – then I start thinking about projects, deadlines, demands, and the shadows and shapes of the house become objects,
suggestions, things that need to done, not a background to thought.

The famous "sleep on it" when we have a dilemma we can't solve is an indication of how important dream time is to human wellbeing. The night allows this dream time, and the heavier, thicker dark of winter gives us a chance to dream a little while we are awake – a kind of reverie or meditation, the constellation of slowness, silence and darkness that sits under the winter stars.

I live in a wood in deep country, so inevitably light and dark keep their natural, non-city qualities for me, and I find myself responding to the changes in the light, and adjusting my ways from outdoors to indoors. I read more in the winter, write more, think more, sleep more. I don't plan any of this – rather I don't resist the seductions of darkness.

And what could be better, on a winter afternoon, than getting into bed with someone you love? Then the darkness is complicit. Bed is where you should be. If it rains outside, that only adds to the pleasure. And don't put the lights on. The Shakespearean bed trick, where it is so dark that somebody ends up making love to the wrong somebody (or as it happens, ultimately the right somebody), could never happen in our bright bedrooms, but the soft velvet of darkness turns even a familiar lover into an unknown encounter.

Making love in the afternoon is completely different in summer and winter. To begin as the afternoon light is fading, to wake up, warm and heavy, when it is completely dark, to kiss and stroke the shared invisible body, to leave the person you love half asleep while you go and open wine ... then the moment of standing barefoot in the kitchen, just a candle and two glasses to take back to bed, and a feeling of content like no other.

It may be an illusion, it may be the bonding hormone called oxytocin, but it is a gift of darkness too, and the slow extended time of love and night.

I like the slowness of night.

When friends from London arrive, high on electric light, like hamsters on a 24/7 wheel, I slow them down by feeding them food with darkness sealed in it: deep red venison stewed in claret, carp from the bottom of the river, root vegetables grown in rich black earth.

Just as our bodies use the sun to store up vitamin D for the winter, so the root vegetables common to autumn and winter have used their summer foliage to lock in the sun. There is a wonderful alchemical image of a black sun – dark, not radiating outwards but inwards – and that packed-in power is what you get in the autumn root
vegetables. Little red turnips and ruby-black beetroot, small rough brown swede and deep orange rounds of carrot are dark suns.

Eating seasonally is not a green fad; it is way of connecting the body to what is really happening out there. We are seasonal creatures – the over-ride button is scarcely 100 years old. Give the body back its seasons and the mind is saner.

I believe in pleasure – but not the same pleasure all the time. Seasonal pleasure prevents boredom and cynicism.

There is great pleasure to be had from coming home on a wild night when the weather is vile, and pouring a glass of good red wine, and cooking dark food, such as mushroom risotto or braised beef and turnips served with dark green cabbage and truffle mash. If you have only 15 minutes to cook, make it mushrooms on toast with chopped parsley, and a chicory and endive salad. But keep the good red wine ... This kind of cooking and eating cheers you up in winter, because it is what the body needs.

If you want to be depressed, spend the long winter nights eating out-of-season food. This is not the time for caesar salads or anything with the words "slim" or "diet" or "low calorie" on the label. After a day in the office, a brisk walk home – even if takes an hour – followed by real winter food, will give you good spirits of the kind not to be found in the over-lit-overheated-bus-in-a-traffic-jam situation, followed by a ready meal.

In the autumn, make the bedroom cooler, not warmer. In winter, keep it slightly chilly, so that there is pleasure in that tingle of cold before you leap into bed with a hot water bottle, a good book and a glass of whisky.

It is a mistake to fight the cold and the dark. We're not freezing or starving in a cave, so we can enjoy what autumn and winter bring, instead of trying to live in a perpetual climate-controlled fluorescent world with the same day-in, day-out processed, packaged, flown-in food.

I have a tiny woodburning stove on my girlfriend's balcony in London. She thinks I'm crazy, but I like to sit in front of it with the lights of the city elsewhere, heating a pan of soup or roasting chestnuts, and yes, I could do that on her fancy Falcon cooker, but I wouldn't be where I like to be in my mind – which is dark without being melancholy, brooding without being depressed.

Food, fire, walks, dreams, cold, sleep, love, slowness, time, quiet, books, seasons – all these things, which are not really things, but moments of life – take on a different
quality at night-time, where the moon reflects the light of the sun, and we have time to
reflect what life is to us, knowing that it passes, and that every bit of it, in its change and
its difference, is the here and now of what we have.

Life is too short to be all daylight. Night is not less; it's more.