

Getting Solar: 5 Things Homeowners Should Know About Solar Energy

There are a number of reasons why you, a property owner, might be interested in installing a solar electric system (also known as photovoltaics, or PV). Maybe you've heard solar can help reduce your monthly utility bills, or get you "off the grid." There are some myths surrounding these ideas. We'll try to clear them up for you as we give you five great reasons to consider solar.

(1) Solar panels reduce your electricity bill

Sometimes we talk with folks who are frustrated with the rising costs of oil and gas, especially over the winter months when residents of colder states are faced with climbing heating bills. They think solar can help. It can't. (At least, PV can't—solar thermal heating technology is a whole different topic!) What solar is meant to do, and does very well, is reduce your monthly electric bill. The electricity generated by your PV system feeds into your building's appliances, like refrigerators, air conditioning units, or lights, just like your regular utility-supplied electricity. If the system is generating more electricity than you happen to be using—say, when you're on vacation during the sunny summer months—then it feeds into the grid instead. Your utility, in all but a few states, will pay you for this net-excess generation (NEG) electricity it gets by giving you credits on your next electric bill. This process is called net metering, and you can read more about it on GetSolar.com.

(2) Solar panels are more affordable than ever

Solar is not a cheap technology to produce or to install: it requires special materials and the experience of a trained master electrician. But over the years, streamlined production processes and an increasingly competitive installation marketplace have driven the cost down. Systems for most homes cost between \$20,000 and \$40,000 before you apply rebates and incentives, which vary state to state (and sometimes, city to city). Sometimes these incentives can cut your out of pocket expenses by almost half. The one nationwide incentive is a tax credit equal to 30% of the total installed cost of your system—thanks, Uncle Sam. **The Database of State Incentives for Renewables & Efficiency** is the best place to browse the incentives available in your state.

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(3) Solar panels can be easily financed

Solar is a big investment, and not all of us have the spare cash to pay for a system outright. Fortunately, there are many options available to help you finance the PV system of your dreams. Energy Efficiency Mortgages, or EEMs, are one such method. Plus, many states offer their own low-interest loans to assist with solar. New York even lets you pay back the loan with the Renewable Energy Credits generated by your system and traded in REC markets. Visit the DSIRE website to learn more about your state's incentives, and come to GetSolar.com to learn more about **financing options** for solar.

(4) Solar panels contribute to a low-carbon economy

Whether you want to "go green" or you're concerned about our dependence on imported energy, installing a PV system is a way to make a difference. The electricity from your PV panels is zero-carbon (once you get past the carbon load of manufacturing, transporting, and installing the panels). The U.S. derives nearly half of its electricity from coal, the most carbon-intensive of all conventional fuels. Every kilowatt-hour produced by your panels is a unit of clean energy that would otherwise have come from your regional utility, which, more likely than not, derives its power from fossil fuels.

(5) Solar panels help stabilize the grid

Unless you live far from municipal power lines, chances are good that your PV system will be grid-tied. That is, you will continue to get part of your electricity from your utility company (at night, or when your PV system is not producing enough electricity for all your needs), and your system will shut off automatically—for safety reasons—in the event of a power outage. The biggest benefit to you is that of net metering, which we talked about earlier, as well as lower cost. But there's another benefit many of us don't think about: distributed generation. Generating your own electricity on-site during peak sun hours helps lessen the burden on the municipal grid when it needs help most, helping protect against brownouts and power surges. There is even a school of thought that envisions distributed generation as an essential element of a "smart grid" for the future.

You can see that using solar panels to produce part of your home's electricity is a viable, practical way of reducing your monthly electric bill while contributing to a lower-carbon economy. Solar isn't right for everybody—is it right for you? Come visit us at GetSolar.com and fill out our **web form**: we're here so you don't have to answer that question on your own.

About GetSolar

At GetSolar.com, we provide a number of free resources, including informative articles on a range of topics, up-to-date solar news and information, and local listings for qualified solar pros. It's all part of our effort to help you make informed choices in the expanding clean energy marketplace.

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