



Solar panels 101 for dummies

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Solar energy (or solar power) is the energy we generate from sunlight. Through a process known as the photovoltaic effect, we can convert energy from the sun's rays into electricity that can power our TVs, refrigerators, lights and other appliances.

Grid-tie systems save money on your electric bill. It's less expensive than buying electricity from the utility company. We recommend this to everyone by default if they can connect to the utility grid. Always build a grid-tied system if you have access to power lines!

Off-grid solar is for delivering power to remote properties without easy access to power lines. They cost more (due to the addition of batteries), and the main value is delivering power to a remote location.

There's a third system type as well, which is a hybrid of the first two: it connects to the grid, but also includes batteries. Solar companies refer to these as either battery backup or energy storage systems. There are two main benefits:

Energy storage systems provide extra peace of mind and get the most from the electricity you generate. It's up to you to decide if it's worth it to spend more on your system for the added flexibility.

Grid-tie solar systems store the power they generate in the public utility grid. In return, the utility company credits your account for the power you generate. Those credits can be claimed to draw power from the grid when the sun isn't out (at night or during poor weather).

In many cases, the utility will buy and sell electricity at the same rate. But some utilities may buy power from solar customers at reduced rates, which has a real impact on the ROI of going solar. So it's important to contact your utility and understand the terms of their net metering policy.

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