

Plug in: to installing solar power



Sourcing your energy from the sun can be a smart move, for your wallet and the planet. This step-by-step guide outlines what to look out for, what questions to ask and how to make the right choice for your home.

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Step 1: Understanding if solar is right for you.

What is a solar power system?

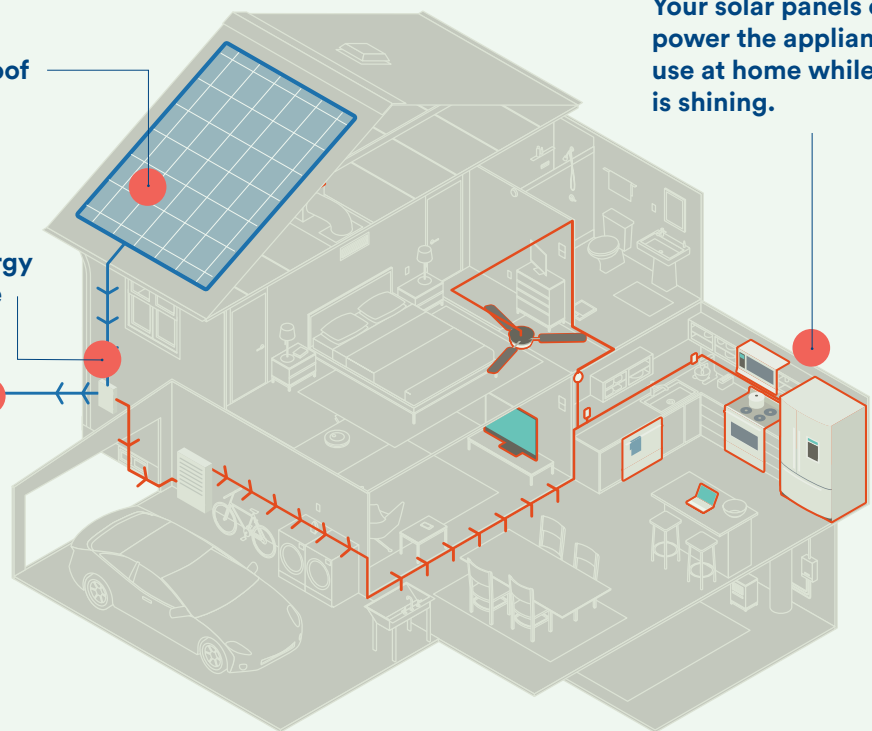
During the day, your solar power system (also known as a solar PV system) provides electricity to your house, reducing the amount of energy you buy from your electricity provider. It also means the energy you're using is renewable.



The solar panels on the roof turn sunlight into energy.

An inverter converts the energy into electricity for your home

Electricity you don't use during the day may be able to be sent to the grid for other people to use. You could also be paid for the solar power you sell.



Your solar panels can help power the appliances you use at home while the sun is shining.



Wanting to install a solar battery at your home? Check out our step-by-step guides to installation and use at energytechguide.com.au

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What are the benefits of solar power?

Save (and maybe make!) money: you're using electricity that you've produced, instead of buying it from a provider; and if you are using less energy than you're producing, your energy provider may buy it off you to share with your community.

Reducing your impact on the environment: by using the sun to power your home, you are generating zero-emissions energy for yourself and possibly your neighbours.

It also helps you reduce reliance on providers: instead of depending solely on an energy provider, you are making some of your own energy.

Remember:

There may be times, such as in winter or on cloudy days, when your solar panels will not produce enough energy for your home. To fill this gap you will use regular energy from the grid, which you will be billed for.

Is a solar power system right for me?

Q&A

Can I install solar panels on my roof?

Look out for heritage overlay and Owner's Corporation permission if you own your property, or landlord permission if you are a renter.

Is my roof suitable for solar power?

If it's large enough, faces north, east or west, and is not too shaded, then probably. A good retailer will help you make this assessment.

How long will it take for the savings to exceed the cost?

Usually between 5 and 10 years. It depends on the cost and size of the system, where you live, how much electricity you use during the day and what you get paid for your feed-in. A good solar system should usually last for 25 years or more, so there's plenty of time to recoup your expenses and enjoy free electricity. A good retailer will estimate your approximate payback period.



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Step 2: Choosing a solar retailer

How to find a good solar retailer.

As the solar panel market has grown, so has the number of retailers to choose from. Like any industry, most retailers are knowledgeable and honest but a few are not so good. The best ways to find a good solar retailer are:



Ask people you know about good experiences they've had with solar retailers.



Use recommendation services, like [SolarQuotes](#) or [Solar Choice](#), which list retailers that have good customer recommendations.



Look for retailers that are members of a best practice industry scheme, such as the [Approved Solar Retailer scheme](#) run by the Clean Energy Council. Some state government solar rebate programs will require you to use one of these retailers.

Once you have found a few solar retailers you like, you can compare their quotes to find the offer that best suits your needs.

What should I look out for in my quote?

In your quote, a good retailer will give clear information about:



- The details and cost of the different system components – brand, capacity, warranties, and so on. Many solar panels have 25-year warranties, and many inverters have 10-year warranties.
- The expected performance of the system and an estimate of the financial benefits it will bring you.
- Timelines for starting and completing installation.
- An installation warranty: this is different to component warranties and covers any problems with the installation. Some will even cover work needed after the warranty period to replace components that fail during their product warranty period.
- Whether the system includes a monitoring system with an app to show how your system is performing, or how much it will cost to add such a monitoring system to your solar system.



Want to know more about how to purchase and install new energy tech? This is one of ten factsheets that can help you.

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Questions to ask retailers when quoting:

- Are there any issues with my property that will affect the cost of installation? Such as shading, roof shape, orientation, required system upgrades or network limitations?
- How long will installation take?
- Am I eligible for any rebates or subsidies? If so, how much will they reduce the cost of the system by? How do I access these rebates?
- How long will it take me to pay back the cost of the system with my energy bill savings?
- What are the warranties on components and installation?
- Will my system provide electricity during a power outage?

Signing the contract and paying for your solar power system.

Once you have reviewed some quotes and found the best retailer for you, you will be asked to sign a purchase contract.

A good retailer must:



- Give you a contract that is clearly written and not full of technical language.
- Explain the contract to you and point out any specifics you should be aware of.
- Detail the payment process to you and what happens if the contract needs to be ended. For example, whether your entire deposit will be refunded or only part of it.
- Explain what happens on the rare occasion that an issue is discovered on installation, this should also be detailed in your contract.

After you have signed your contract, there will be a few options for paying for your solar power system. You should check what option best suits your financial situation.



You could pay up-front.



Your state government might offer low or no-interest loans for solar power.



You might redraw on your mortgage.



The solar retailer may offer finance so you pay in installments.



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Before accepting finance (i.e. paying in installments) from your solar retailer, ask:

- Is the total cost different if I accept financing?
- How much is the interest?
- Are there any additional fees?
- Are there any payment terms or conditions that you must meet?
- Are there any additional fees you'll be charged if you fail to meet terms and conditions?
- Will this affect my credit rating?
- What happens if I have trouble making a payment?

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Step 3: Getting your solar installed.

What happens on installation day?

Your solar retailer will have nominated a day for installation to start and let you know if there are any changes to the date or timeframe.

For installation, your solar retailer will:

- Arrange for safe delivery and installation at your property.
- Inform you of any inconveniences such as blocking driveways or having to turn your electricity off during part of the installation.
- Tell you about any problems that occur and what it will cost to fix them.
- Give you clear instructions for how to use your system, and information sheets or manuals for the components. Make sure you keep this component information somewhere safe because you will need it if you have a warranty claim.
- Clean up when they are done.
- Advise you of the installer's name and details.

On rare occasion, a solar installer will find a significant issue on site that prevents installation or limits the size or performance of a system so much that it's not worth installing. In these situations the retailer should offer to terminate the contract and refund you some or all of your deposit.



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How do I activate my system?

Once your system is installed, it needs to be properly tested and 'commissioned' (activated). This involves registering it with your energy provider so they can set up your meter and their billing systems to accommodate your new solar system. This can take some time.

A good installer must:

- Keep you informed as to how it's progressing.
- Tell you anything you need to do to help it along.
- Let you know when it's done.

How do I start using my system?

Once it's all up and running you'll be helping to power your home with your own solar panels.

A good retailer must:

- Give you clear information about how to safely use, maintain and get the most out of your solar power system.
- Show you how to find out and understand how your system is working:
 - How much electricity it is producing.
 - How much energy you are using.
 - How much energy you are feeding into the grid.



Finding, purchasing and installing solar power for your home can be straightforward and successful. Use this as your step-by-step guide.

Already using solar power? Check out our guide 'Plug in: to using solar power' to find out about your rights, consumer protections and how to get the most out of your system.

