

HOME & GARDEN

IT IS POSSIBLE TO DIY SOLAR PANELS FOR YOUR HOME—HERE'S HOW

A handmade approach to creating renewable energy



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Solar panels are becoming an increasingly viable way to power your home thanks to their efficiency and decrease in cost. They're especially affordable now thanks to the **tax credits** available for those who use solar panels for their homes. That said, cheaper or not, renovating your home can be a daunting undertaking, especially if you're considering installing a **solar panel** system yourself. While it is possible to DIY, there are several variables you must consider in your planning.

Do you have the necessary skills, experience, and understanding?

Installing a solar panel system can be complicated, with numerous consequences of incorrect installation, including the power simply not working, leaks in your roof, or even an electrical fire. You need a clear understanding of both electrical systems and how to physically install a large, heavy structure either on your roof or on the ground.

Before you get too far down the path of installing a solar panel system yourself, be honest about whether you have the skill set required and the willingness and time to learn how. If you don't, you should bring in a professional who can install the systems for you. After all, it's typically **more expensive to bring someone in to fix a project** than to bring them in to do it right the first time.

Research the specific requirements for your type of system



Credit: Getty Images / jacoblund

Before taking the deep dive into DIY-ing, make sure you've done the necessary research and have the paperwork to back it up.

Depending on the kind of solar panel system you're installing and where you live, there are different regulations, permits, and inspection requirements. In many areas, installing solar on a home that remains connected to the grid comes with stringent rules for both the plan and the installation, including coordination with your utility company.

If you're installing an off-grid system, such as to an outbuilding, cabin, or RV, then the requirements are likely far less demanding, though you likely still need permits and inspections. Before you dive into detailed planning for your project, reach out to your local building department and find out exactly what requirements have to be fulfilled with your type of system.

Not all solar panels are created equal

When looking into the hardware itself, it can be tempting to save money with the cheapest panels available. However, the purchase price doesn't always tell the whole story in terms of affordability. First and foremost, consider the durability of the panels. Does the company have a reputation for long-lasting systems, and do they have a warranty to back that reputation up? If you have to replace the system after 10 years when a slightly more expensive system would have lasted 25 years, you didn't save any money.

The second consideration is the efficiency of the panels. The more efficient, the more power you'll generate, and the more of your electrical costs you'll offset. Those costs add up over the life of the system. A 10% lower installation price might be negated by the increased energy production associated with higher-quality panels.

Be aware of hidden costs



Credit: Getty Images / beekeepx

To make the most out of your investment, be sure you're not ignoring that much needed repair to your roof or those dead trees hanging around your yard.

Don't overlook the costs above and beyond the panels, rails, wires, and batteries that come with installing a solar panel system. For example, if you install a new solar panel system on the roof, you may need to reinforce the underlying structure. Before you begin, make sure that the roof shingles are relatively new, or plan on the expense of removing the system to install a new roof a few years down the road.

Another consideration is making sure that your system sits in as much sunlight during the day as possible. This may mean taking down some trees, which can cost thousands of dollars if you need to bring in a professional. Other extra costs might include upgrading your electric panel, keeping them snow-free in the winter, and dealing with potential damage.

Consider battery storage

Solar panels only generate power when the sun is shining. When installed on your home, a dip in sunlight usually isn't an issue when you're connected to the power grid, and you can just draw from that power overnight or on dim, cloudy winter days. However, if you're using solar in an off-grid installation, such as a cabin in the woods, then you need to figure out how to get power when the sun isn't out.

One option is to use a gasoline-powered **generator**, so long as you operate it **safely**. If you want to stick to solar power, there are numerous options for battery storage, which use solar power to charge them for use when the sun isn't out. Battery systems are a fantastic complement to a solar setup but may come with installation complexities and a specific set of regulations and building codes to know.

When in doubt, bring in a professional to help



Don't feel guilty for needing to phone in a professional. In the end, they'll save you time *and* money.

Sometimes you can't do every step of the process yourself—and indeed, there are certain situations where you may not legally be allowed to do all the work yourself. You don't have to hire a company to take on the whole project or do it yourself. Many professionals can come in at various steps to help you with planning, installation, or navigating the regulatory and code framework. If a part of the process seems too far outside your wheelhouse, reach out to a professional for help.

After all, you don't save any money if you install a solar panel system that doesn't ever work.

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