



4 renewable sources of energy

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Active solar energy uses special technology to capture the sun's rays. The two main types of equipment are photovoltaic cells (also called PV cells or solar cells) and mirrors that focus sunlight in a specific spot. These active solar technologies use sunlight to generate electricity, which we use to power lights, heating systems, computers, and televisions.

Other examples of passive solar technology are green roofs, cool roofs, and radiant barriers. Green roofs are completely covered with plants. Plants can get rid of pollutants in rainwater and air. They help make the local environment cleaner.

Sunshine can also be hard to predict. It can be blocked by clouds, and the sun doesn't shine at night. Different parts of Earth receive different amounts of sunlight based on location, the time of year, and the time of day.

People have been harnessing the wind's energy for a long, long time. Five-thousand years ago, ancient Egyptians made boats powered by the wind. In 200 B.C.E., people used windmills to grind grain in the Middle East and pump water in China.

Today, we capture the wind's energy with wind turbines. A turbine is similar to a windmill; it has a very tall tower with two or three propeller-like blades at the top. These blades are turned by the wind. The blades turn a generator (located inside the tower), which creates electricity.

Wind is not always a steady source of energy, however. Wind speed changes constantly, depending on the time of day, weather, and geographic location. Currently, it cannot be used to provide electricity for all our power needs.

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