



Home solar power installation

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Solar panel systems, also called solar photovoltaic (PV) systems, are an increasingly popular choice for homeowners looking to reduce their carbon footprint and save money on energy bills. Before choosing a new system, you should know what options work for your roof, the best ways to connect the panels, and more. This guide walks you through the key steps of solar panel installation, from choosing the right location to maintaining the system.

The effectiveness of a solar panel system largely depends on its placement. Two main factors come into play when deciding where to install solar panels: tilt angle and orientation.

If you're in the United States, the optimal tilt angle typically ranges between 15 and 40 degrees, depending on the latitude of your location. As for orientation, south-facing panels generally produce the most energy, followed by east and west-facing installations. North-facing panels are the least desirable due to their low energy production.

Roof-mounted solar panels are the most common choice for residential installations in the United States. They offer a better return on investment than ground-mount systems and save on space. However, your available roof space, as well as its pitch and orientation, restricts this design. There may also be obstructions, such as chimneys and vents.

Solar shingles are another option for your roof. They resemble conventional roofing materials but also convert energy. However, they tend to be more expensive to install than traditional roof-mounted panels.

Ground-mounted solar panel systems are an excellent alternative if you have ample yard space, especially if your roof isn't ideal for panels. Since you can optimize the tilt and orientation, you can maximize energy production. They're also easier to maintain and clean. It's important to note that ground-mount systems are more typically expensive than roof-mount systems.

Once you decide on a location, the next step is to install the mounting structure and secure the solar panels. The process differs depending on whether it's a roof or ground installation. If you're installing a roof mount, you'll need to properly install the racking system or you could void your roof's warranty.

A railed system, a set of rails that hold the solar modules, is used for pitched roofs. You need to first identify the rafter locations. Then, add flashings along these spots to provide structural support for the system. IronRidge, a solar mounting racking manufacturing company, provides a short video on this process. Two sets of clamps and fasteners secure the rails, followed by the solar panels.



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Flat roof installations often use a ballasted racking system, which harnesses the power of gravity. Installers add landscaping pavers or concrete blocks to the bottom of the system's frame to hold the frame and top solar panels in place.

You can adjust the panels on this racking system between 5 and 30 degrees, depending on the type of panel and the manufacturer. You also have the option to install a dual-orientation (east and west) system. While it's still less efficient than a south-facing system, this solution can provide more consistent energy production.

Ground-mounted systems require a different approach. A ground foundation using helical piles or concrete piers provides structural support to the panels and rails. The type of soil in your yard impacts the best foundation option.

During this step, note that as long as the solar panels are receiving sunlight, they have an open circuit voltage. Be careful when handling them. For safety, disconnect the grid from the load so no electricity will flow.

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