



Solar panels for existing homes

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As subject matter experts, we provide only objective information. We design every article to provide you with deeply-researched, factual, useful information so that you can make informed home electrification and financial decisions. We have:

We won't charge you anything to get quotes through our marketplace. Instead, installers and other service providers pay us a small fee to participate after we vet them for reliability and suitability. To learn more, read about how we make money, our Dispute Resolution Service, and our Editorial Guidelines.

The economics will probably look a lot different then the first time you went solar. (And if you live in a state like California that upended its solar incentives, you're probably better off leaving your old setup alone.) But with the right installer, enough space, and a willingness to compromise, new panels can help the environment and your bottom line. Here's what to watch out for when you're going solar again.

Not all roof space is great for solar. If the only open real estate you have is on the northern part of your roof, it'll be tough to make the math work for new solar. One alternative: Replace your old equipment with newer, higher-efficiency panels.

Expect some compromises. New panels won't match the old ones, and they'll probably need a separate monitoring system. Expect to pay above-market rates for new solar given the hassles of working around an old system.

Be ready to hunt for a willing installer. A lot of contractors won't get near any solar panels that were installed by someone else. But there are exceptions. We can help you find one through the EnergySage Marketplace.

When you change an existing solar energy system, your utility company can force you to adopt newer incentives for your entire set of solar panels--not just the new ones. (Or at least any panels that are tied to your home's electrical meter, and by extension the grid.)

This is a non-issue in most parts of the U.S., where residential solar policies have barely changed in more than a decade. The incentives will be the same as they were the last time you went solar. Would-be solar expanders will still need to apply for new permits and a new interconnection agreement, but it won't really affect your bottom line.

California is the most recent example. In 2023, the state utility commission instituted a new billing scheme (NEM 3.0) that completely changed the economics of new residential solar setups. The utility companies are entitled to buy your excess daytime solar energy at something like a 75% discount, but still charge you full price for any energy that you buy from their grid. Hawaii, Arizona, and Nevada made similar changes, where



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old solar customers are grandfathered in for a period but new customers have to accept less-favorable billing terms.

If you're on an older net metering plan that pays closer to 100% for your excess power, it's usually best to keep your grandfathered interconnection agreement in place--and that means leaving your existing system alone, at least for a decade.

Does it ever make sense to add new panels to an old system that's grandfathered into a better metering plan? "Adding extra solar might still be worth it, sometimes," says Matt Schuler, a Senior Energy Advisor at EnergySage, who guides solar shoppers through the process of comparing quotes and choosing an installer. "But the payback period would be much longer, and you'd probably have to add a battery."

Huge expansions. If you tack on enough extra capacity, plus a battery, the total savings on your utility bills could work out in your favor, in spite of meager payouts from the utility companies.

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