



# Solar water heater disadvantages

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Solar hot water systems are an attractive alternative to traditional water heaters. Before upgrading to a solar hot water setup, it's important to understand the pros and cons of the technology.

Heating your water with energy from the sun is one way to take advantage of free, renewable solar energy. As with any energy decision, there will be advantages and disadvantages of using a solar hot water system. Here are some top pros and cons to keep in mind when exploring your options:

Just like solar PV systems, installing solar hot water will help you save on energy bills. Whether you currently heat your water with electricity, gas, or some other fuel, solar hot water systems provide some amount of free hot water each day, and those savings add up over time. Depending on the technology you currently use to heat up your property's water, your payback period, or the length of time it takes to recoup your initial investment, for solar hot water will vary.

Once you install a solar hot water system, you won't need to worry much about maintenance. It's a good idea to replace the circulated antifreeze fluid and have your system inspected by a contractor every few years as safety precautions, but in general, active maintenance requirements are minimal. What's more, a well-maintained solar hot water installation can last for more than 20 years, all the while producing free hot water with solar energy.

Any time you use fossil fuels like natural gas to heat up your water, greenhouse gases get released into the atmosphere. Even technologies powered by electricity cause pollution - if you're powering your home's hot water system with electricity from the grid, that electricity is likely generated from fossil fuels. With a solar hot water system, you can be 100 percent sure you're using a zero-emissions renewable resource for your water heating needs.

As with many home improvement projects, a solar hot water installation has significant upfront costs. As a rough estimate, a full hot water system might cost around \$9,000 before any rebates and incentives (like the federal ITC) that help offset the upfront costs of a solar hot water installation.

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One of the most important factors to consider when determining the feasibility of a solar hot water system for your property is your local climate. You don't need sun every day of the year for solar hot water to make sense: systems always include a backup heater (usually gas or electric), so even when you have cloudy or snowy days, you won't run out of hot water. However, you'll save more on your water heating bills if you live in a sunny area because you won't have to use the backup heating source as frequently.

As the name suggests, a solar hot water system only provides heated water and can't power your electric appliances. To use solar energy to power the rest of your home, you'll have to install a photovoltaic (PV) solar energy system, which produces usable electricity for your property. Importantly, if you have an electric water heater, it may make more sense to install a solar PV system instead of solar hot water, as you can use renewable solar electricity to run your electric water heating setup.

If you want to heat your home water supply with free solar energy and don't mind the upfront cost of installation, a solar hot water system might be right for you. The significant utility bill savings and environmental benefits of solar hot water make it a great option for many properties. However, don't forget to weight the drawbacks of solar water heating against the potential positives. In areas with significant shading or snowy weather, solar hot water may just not be productive enough to provide a significant enough return on investment.

One option for property owners looking to take advantage of solar energy is to install a solar electric system, either alongside solar hot water or on its own. To see how much you could save with solar, check out our Solar Calculator, which estimates electric bill savings based on your unique property and energy usage.

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