



Consumer reports on solar companies

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Key Questions and Answers About Going Solar. Installing solar panels can lower your electricity costs, reduce your tax bill, and offer healthy future returns. But there's a lot to consider ...

A look at how today's residential solar systems generate enough power to meet all or most of a household's electricity needs. 1. The Grid. Homes with solar power remain connected to the grid ...

Sunlux, Project Solar and Freedom Solar Power are the top solar companies, based on customer reviews, equipment options, warranties and other factors.

The steep up-front costs for a residential solar system can make a leasing company's sales pitch sound pretty appealing: Pay little or nothing and save hundreds of dollars per year on average.

Solar panels can reduce your monthly electric bills significantly. And as prices for rooftop solar continue to plummet, more and more Americans are considering adding solar panels on their...

Under a bright June sky in 1979, at the height of the nation's energy crisis, President Jimmy Carter stood on the roof of the White House to dedicate solar panels installed there to heat water for the staff kitchen. That powerful gesture, which gave America a taste of its clean-energy future, was as symbolic as it was historic: At the time, converting a typical American house to solar power was extremely rare and cost roughly half as much as the house itself.

A lot has changed in the intervening 37 years: Solar costs have dropped so much that today it's possible to generate all or most of a home's electricity--for decades to come--for about the purchase price of a new economy car. Solar installations have increased dramatically. And President Obama has installed new panels on the White House roof.

oEnergy Efficiency GuideoThe Real Cost of Leasing vs. Buying Solar PanelsoHow Utilities Are Fighting Back on Solar PoweroBetter-Looking Solar Solutions on the Horizon

There has probably never been a better time to switch to solar. Thirty-one states and the District of Columbia have regulations that are solar-friendly enough (and electricity rates high enough) to make residential solar financially attractive (see map below), and last December Congress extended through 2021 the generous federal tax credits on solar projects that had been set to expire at the end of this year. Residential solar installations increased almost 60 percent between 2014 and 2015, and in 2015 America averaged one new residential solar installation about every 100 seconds.

Those who want to wait on the sidelines for further price reductions could be disappointed: The cost of solar



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panels has started to plateau and, while installation labor and other soft costs continue to fall, the phasing out of state tax incentives and utility rebates and grants has largely offset those savings. Adding an element of urgency to the equation are proposals in a number of states that would radically shrink the utility-bill savings of switching to solar power (see "How Utilities Are Fighting Back on Solar Power"). Because, generally speaking, existing solar customers haven't been subject to those changes, getting your deal done before new regulations are implemented could save you hundreds of dollars each year.

Though going solar has never been easier or more affordable, the process is not without its potential pitfalls. For instance, most homeowners who switch to solar power are pocketing just a fraction of what they could be saving because they choose to lease their panels rather than to buy them (see "The Real Cost of Leasing vs. Buying").

Determining whether solar is a smart move involves more than checking out how much sun your roof gets each day. You also need to consider the cost of electricity in your area and any local tax incentives. The "instant estimate" tool at the EnergySage website uses aerial photos of your house to analyze your roof and taps into databases to predict whether solar would save you money--and about how much. The site, which received funding from the Department of Energy, also provides installation quotes from local installers. Other steps you'll need to take:

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