



Solar system converter

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Setting up a solar power system can be overwhelming. There are a lot of different products on the market now -- ranging drastically in price -- and it can be tough to navigate the various pieces needed for a given setup.

Two frequently confused components involved in home setups are solar converters and inverters. This article will explain the basic differences between the two transformers and give you some advice when deciding which of each type to buy.

In a solar energy array, a converter is an electrical device that adjusts direct current (DC) voltage output either up or down from the input level. Often called charge controllers, these DC-to-DC converters can maximize the energy harvest for photovoltaic systems and help regulate the amount of DC energy running through the system. This means that everything in the system beyond the controller -- battery banks, inverters, and the like -- receive a more consistent current.

There are two main types of charge controllers:

Pulse Width Modulation (PWM) Controller: This type of device is basically a switch that connects a solar array to a battery. While functional, these devices aren't particularly complex; they don't adjust for greater efficiency during more or less sunny times of day, for instance.

Maximum Power Point Tracking (MPPT) Controller: MPPT controllers are much more sophisticated in function. They can adjust their energy intake, helping to increase overall output efficiency for your solar array.

Sometimes mistakenly called a converter, solar panel inverters deal less with voltage level and more with current type, switching power from DC to alternating current (AC) -- what most home appliances use to function. Without a solar inverter, energy harnessed by solar panels can't easily be put to use.

There are three types of inverters commonly used in solar power systems:

Microinverters: A microinverter is a small inverter situated close to a solar panel, which converts the DC electricity produced by a single panel. Because they work with single solar panels, microinverters allow your array to continue working even if one panel malfunctions. They are, however, more expensive than other types of solar inverters and require more maintenance.

String Inverters: This is a common inverter type for both home and commercial solar power systems. String inverters are highly efficient, robust, and inexpensive compared to other inverter types, but they do not have panel-level monitoring, and their high voltage may present a potential safety hazard.



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Central Inverters: These are designed for larger arrays, and they basically function as a more consolidated version of string inverters. They have a low capital price per watt, are highly efficient, and are relatively easy to install. The downsides of central inverters are their size, potential noise pollution, and the fact that if one part of an array fails, the whole system may do so too.

Do note that some more contemporary solar power inverters -- especially microinverters -- also function as MPPT converters. These options can help simplify your system and cut costs.

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