

Going Solar

How to find
the right solar
installer for
your home

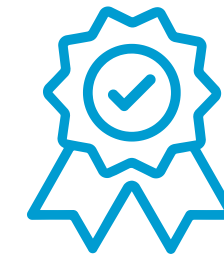


INTRODUCTION

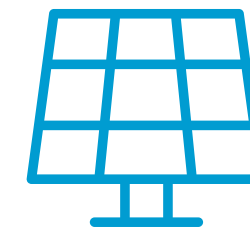
How to find the right solar installer for your home

The choice you make for home solar products and installation is something you get to (or have to) live with for decades. Many solar installation companies out there offer low-priced solar products and installations. But the old adage you get what you pay for couldn't be truer than when it comes to solar products— and installation partners.

This guide will help you choose the right solar installation company. One that can customize a solar system to match your needs, with high-quality solar products, and payment options that meet your budget. When you meet with solar companies, here are some questions to ask with advice on evaluating the answers.



Part 1. Experience



Part 2. Equipment



Part 3. Payment



Part 4. Red Flags

Experience

Hire a solar installer who knows what solar works best in your specific geographic region. There is a reason you wouldn't hire a contractor in Arizona to work on your house in Texas—the same is true for solar installations.



Experience

How much experience does your crew have installing in my area?

Weather and sunlight vary from region to region, so you want to hire an installer who can design a system that works well in your climate. Plus, local experience is important because the solar installer will likely be more familiar with local building and electrical codes. This is a huge asset because installing solar is an electrical construction project, which requires following local city codes and obtaining the proper permits. If your installer has a strong relationship with the local permitting offices and inspectors, it can help your installation go smoothly, avoiding potential hold-ups caused by changes in local codes or utility requirements.



Quick Tip

Local installers are likely more familiar with local building and electrical codes.

Experience

Is my home your typical solar installation?

To save costs, some companies have template designs and might not be able to customize a solar system specifically for your home. So rather than relying on a template approach, look for a company who works with the specifics of your home and roof— what direction it faces, what it's made of and if it's shaded. A solar system designed for your roof's conditions will maximize your system's performance, and that's exactly what you want.



Quick Tip

A solar system designed specifically for your roof's conditions will work better on your roof.

Experience

What type of licenses, certification and credentials does your crew have?

Any solar company worth working with will be licensed and bonded, and this information will be easy to track down. Ask if anyone on staff has a certification and if they'll be involved in your project. It's also a big plus if the solar company has a licensed electrician and other certified tradesmen on staff, so also ask if licensed technicians will be installing your panels. Solar is relatively new technology, and installing it requires knowledge of other building trades. A company that has professionals with additional expertise, like roofing, means they have the ability to provide well-rounded service for your installation.



Quick Tip

Experience with other building trades, like roofing, can make it easier to install solar.

Equipment

There are big differences in how solar equipment is designed and manufactured. As a baseline, expect to install solar that performs as promised and under warranty for the next 25 years. Anything less is not a good use of your time or money.



Equipment

What brands of equipment will be installed on my roof?

Your solar system is going to be up on your roof for a long time, and you deserve to know the brand name of the company that made it.



Quick Tip

Research the brand name of the components being installed on your roof.

Equipment

What is the warranty on the equipment?

if you expect your system to last 25 years (which you should) then the warranty should last that long, too.



Quick Tip

Ask for a copy of the warranty of each component.

Equipment

What's the efficiency, durability and performance of your panels?

When a solar installer refers to panel efficiency, they are talking about a term that directly translates to your energy savings. The higher the efficiency rating, the better the panel is at producing energy, resulting in more electricity generated to offset your utility bill and more savings in your wallet.

Durability ratings quantify how well a panel will hold up on your roof over time. The higher the durability ratings, the longer the solar panel is going to last. Your roof can be a pretty tough place and you want to invest in panels that can withstand wear and tear for at least 25 years.

Performance refers to how much energy the panel is producing, from day one throughout its lifespan. Every solar panel produces less energy over time, but not at the same rate. Some panels degrade quickly, producing far less energy at year 10 than year one. Other panels degrade more slowly, maintaining high performance rates throughout their entire lifespan—25 years or longer.



Quick Tip

Ask for a copy of the warranty of each component being installed (panel, inverter, battery).

Payment

Home solar is an investment that can offer decades of stable returns. The solar company you partner up with should prepare you for purchase with financing options and a forecast of your near and long-term energy savings.



Equipment

What are my financing options?

How you'll pay for your solar system should be as custom-fit as your system. Quality solar companies will offer several options for payment, including cash purchases, and loans. Loans are becoming a very popular way to pay for a solar system, with options to finance for up to 25 years and highly competitive interest rates.



Quick Tip

Quality solar companies will offer several options for payment, including cash, and loans.

Equipment

Who is the financier?

You will have your solar for decades to come, so you want to know that you'll be working with a reputable and stable financial institution. The solar company should be transparent about who is financing or underwriting your loan. Look for a financial company with experience financing solar and an understanding of the industry. As with loans, you'll want to secure low interest rates and favorable terms for the duration of your agreement.



Quick Tip

Quality solar companies will offer several options for payment, including cash, and loans.

Equipment

What are my savings?

You will have your solar for decades to come, so you want to know that you'll be working with a reputable and stable financial institution. The solar company should be transparent about who is financing or underwriting your loan. Look for a financial company with experience financing solar and an understanding of the industry. As with loans, you'll want to secure low interest rates and favorable terms for the duration of your agreement.

All solar companies should provide you with a detailed proposal that includes how much you can expect to save on energy with the solar system they're suggesting. This information comes from analyzing your energy use for the last year and the size of installation, while factoring in available federal and local incentives.

All of these factors contribute to the projections for your near and longer-term savings potential with solar. To ensure you are getting the accurate estimates, be sure to ask potential solar partners to explain how much you'll save with your solar system in 5, 10 and 20 years down the line. This is the only way you can accurately set your financial expectations.



Quick Tip

Be sure to ask potential solar partners how much you'll save with your system in 5, 10 and 20 years.

Red Flags

Unfortunately, there is a lot of misinformation out there about home solar, and as a first-time customer, you don't know what you don't know. Think twice about solar companies that spread the following—they may not have your best interest in mind.



Red Flags

"All solar panels are the same"

From performance to product lifespan to price, solar panels are very different. You have a right to know what solar products will be installed on your roof, and beyond that, your solar installation partner should be asking for your input during this process versus dictating what you will get.

The installation company should be able to provide technical specifications on solar panel efficiency, degradation rate and durability ratings. You should be suspicious if they try to skirt the issue or are hesitant to provide this information.

Durability, efficiency, degradation rates and wattage are all indicators of system performance, which will determine the amount of energy your panels will produce today and well into the future.



Quick Tip

You have a right to know what solar products will be installed on your roof.

Red Flags

Ambiguity around warranty coverage

The installation company should be transparent about the warranties of each piece of equipment including the panels, mounting system, inverters and the service provided post-installation. It's also fair to ask the installation company what happens if they no longer do business in the area and if that's happened before.



Quick Tip

Ask the solar installation company what happens if you experience an issue and they no longer do business in the area.

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Red Flags

Pushing one kind of financing

Many solar companies encourage buyers to use their solar financing packages since income from the financing is an important part of their business model. If the solar company is pushing one kind of financing over another and not considering what's best for your budget, you might want to walk away (or at least put on the brakes). It's possible the company has a motive for suggesting a specific financing track. Like getting a car loan or mortgage, you want to get several quotes to ensure you get the best financing rates. Also, make sure you understand the terms and conditions of the loan contract you are signing.



Quick Tip

You want to get several quotes to ensure you get the best financing rates.

It is very important to do your due diligence as a consumer when shopping for solar.

Research the companies in your area. When shopping for solar it is best to go in prepared with the correct information to make an informed decision.

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