

Is Residential Solar Right for You?

Switching to solar could help you save money and reduce your carbon footprint

Residential solar energy arrays help you to reduce your hydro costs and your impact on the environment while increasing the value of your home. Whether you live in a condo building or in a residential home, installing a solar system can be a fantastic investment. In some municipalities where [microFIT programs](#) run, your solar array can actually make you money. The high investment costs should be weighed carefully against potential gains. Here are a few things to consider.

Is Your Roof Right for Solar?

If your roof is relatively old, it may be time for a renovation prior to installing your solar panels. Your roof must be in good working order and strong enough to hold the additional weight. Solar panel systems last between 25-40 years. Having to remove your solar installation to repair your roof will be costly, so make sure your roof is right for solar.

A solar array requires about [30-100 square metres for a solar panels](#). Your roof's pitch also needs to be considered (25-50 degrees is ideal) and shade can be a problem. South-facing roofs are best, but east or west-facing surfaces may work in certain circumstances. The roof should not be shaded by neighbouring trees and buildings.

Is the Investment Worth It?

Not all solar systems are created equally and some may be positioned to produce more energy than others. Incentives and rebates offered by local governments can also influence your return on investment. You can visit the [website here](#) to see if your province offers rebates or incentives for residential solar systems. When you are able to avail yourself of these rebates, you could be saving money on your hydro bill in just a few years.

The plummeting cost of solar arrays and the rising cost of hydro mean that, even without a microFIT system or incentives, solar energy and hydro will balance out by 2020. [Canadian Solar Industries Association \(CanSIA\)](#) president John Gorman; "There has been a 50-per-cent drop in the price of residential solar already. We're going to see continued drops over the coming years, and that means not only diminishing subsidies, but an actual payback starting in five years' time."

If you are thinking about going completely off-grid, Gorman estimates that [battery systems](#) will be economically viable by 2025.

A nationwide study by the [US Department of Energy](#) found that solar panel installations added, on average, \$4 per watt. That would mean the average 5kW system may increase the value of your home by

up to \$20,000.

Google has launched "[Project Sunroof](#)" which allows you to utilize Google Earth to check the amount of shading and sun exposure your roof is subjected to. The tool will then calculate the ideal size of your solar array and how much you could save on your hydro bill. It will also link you to rebates and incentives offered by your local government and connect you with solar installers in your area.

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