



# Solar power without grid

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CNET contributor Eric Mack knows all too well what it takes to move completely off the grid and achieve 100% energy independence. "Living off the grid means committing to sourcing everything you need to survive and thrive independently: food, shelter, water, and energy. It's empowering, until the moment things don't work," Mack wrote in his first-person account about living off the grid.

Interested in understanding the impact solar can have on your home? Enter some basic information below, and we'll instantly provide a free estimate of your energy savings.

Although this transition requires significant upfront costs, you could save money in the long run. Here's what to know if you're thinking about buying a solar panel system and disconnecting from the power grid.

Off-grid systems function by using solar panels, often mounted on the rooftop, to absorb energy radiated from the sun and convert it to direct current electricity before transferring it to a battery for storage. An inverter converts the energy stored in the battery to alternating current electricity to power your home.

As inflation continues to erode the dollar's value, more people have embraced cost-effective sustainability practices. These off-grid solar system solutions offer the dual benefit of positively affecting the environment and increasing energy independence.

Grid-tied systems are not independent, standalone entities. Instead, they are connected to the utility grid and transmit excess energy generated by the solar panels back to the electric grid -- often selling it back, through a process called net metering, for credits on your power bill. The primary advantage of grid-tied systems is they are significantly cheaper because the owners do not need to buy expensive batteries to add to the system.

When it comes to off-grid vs. grid-tied solar systems, there is no easy answer, said Rohit Kalyanpur, CEO of Optivolt, a Silicon Valley-based solar technology company. It all depends on your preferences and needs.

For example, If you live in a remote area and don't have reliable access to the electricity grid, then an off-grid solar system would work better, said Kalyanpur.

Both grid-tied and off-grid solar systems are eligible for a 30% federal tax credit on the total cost of the system. In order for batteries to qualify for the credit, they'll have to have a capacity of at least 3 kilowatt-hours.

Each off-grid solar system installed at a location must be customized to meet the unique energy needs of the

people at that location, Kalyanpur said. However, three main types of off-grid solar systems cater to the energy needs of most people.

These systems rely exclusively on solar panels for power generation. The excess energy generated from the solar panels is stored in batteries and used when the panels don't generate enough power to run the home -- such as at night or when it's cloudy. The cost of these systems depends on factors such as the number of solar panels, battery capacity and efficiency, and the types of inverters and charge controllers.

These systems combine solar panels with a backup generator. The solar system generates electricity during the day, and the portable home generator kicks in during periods of low sunlight or at night. These backup generators are usually powered by diesel, gasoline or natural gas. The cost of backup generators varies, so it's essential to research and understand the costs associated with fueling the generator on a monthly basis before making a decision.

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