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How to go solar as a renter

Solar power is a carbon-neutral source of energy that can save money, help the environment, and even protect your home from power outages. But what if you're a renter who wants to take advantage of these benefits, but can't install solar panels on your roof yourself? Here's a few ways you can get involved with the solar transition.

Community solar

Community solar is a solar energy model that allows people to buy or lease part of an offsite solar array. This provides a way for people who cannot install rooftop solar for financial reasons, have rooftops unsuitable for solar, or who are renters to get the benefits of solar- namely, a share of the proceeds created by a solar array. The way it works is that a subscriber organization (which can be a nonprofit, a utility, a government entity, or another group) is responsible for setting up and managing a solar array, and then allows subscribers or customers (who can be individuals, nonprofits, businesses, and others) to buy or lease part of the array, often by signing a contract that lays out the terms of the agreement.



Subscribers then usually receive a discount or credit off of their electric bill equivalent to the amount of energy produced from their portion of the array. The Inflation Reduction Act has several provisions that aim to spur the development of community solar by making funding more widely available- including [\\$7 billion](#) in funding for state distributed solar programs.

Community solar allows you to buy or lease part of a solar array, and get the financial benefits of that solar production. Renewable energy credits (RECs) allow you to support renewable energy, but you don't actually own the windmill or solar array that produces it. If you have access to community solar in your area, it's generally a better option financially and is a more direct way to support renewable energy.

Here's a few things to know before you get started:

- **The options for community solar available near you**

- The US currently has [5.3 gigawatts](#) of community solar installed as of 2022- enough to power almost [4 million homes](#). 41 states and Washington D.C. have at least one community solar project available.
- There are some tools that allow potential subscribers to search for community solar near them on a [national level](#), and many more state tools that do the same.
- If there's no community solar in your state, speak up about it to your elected officials! Favorable regulations on the local and state level can make a huge difference as to whether it's practical to set up community solar in an area or not.

- **How much electricity your household uses**

- This will help you pick out the subscription that best fits your energy needs. This information will be on your utility bill, measured in Kilowatt-Hours.
- If you're planning on taking steps to [electrify your home](#), like [replacing gas appliances](#) or [buying an electric vehicle](#), keep in mind that this will increase your electricity usage and adjust accordingly.

- **The terms of the contract**

- Like any other purchase, it's important to [do your homework](#) when purchasing a community solar array. If there are multiple options to choose from in your area, take a look at your options and determine which is best for your needs.
- You should check how much the [subscription costs](#) per month, as well as how much of a credit you will receive on your electric bill via [virtual net metering](#) (the process by which subscribers get their electric bill reduced by the amount of energy their solar panels produce), and how the subscription is set up. Some projects may offer greater savings than others!
- Understand the cancellation process- some contracts will charge a fee to cancel your subscription, while others may simply require a notice of a certain number of days or months.

- **The company**

- Look into the organization providing solar. Your local Better Business Bureau will have information on most companies providing solar. Some community solar may also be provided by nonprofit organizations, governments, or other institutions.

Renewable energy certificates

Renewable energy certificates, or [RECs](#), are another way to get involved with clean energy without installing solar panels on your own roof. RECs essentially allow you to pay an electric provider for the right to claim renewable energy for your clean energy goals. Unlike community solar, when you purchase RECs, you don't get a discount on your electrical bill. At their best, RECs can help finance new clean energy projects, but there's a few things to look out for.

- **Ensure that your RECs are verified**

- RECs are less effective when the supplier engages in practices like counting credits twice, using aging facilities (which means your purchase isn't supporting new renewable generation), or locating in areas where renewables were going to be built regardless.
- Verification systems like [Green-e](#) can help you find the RECs that are most effective at encouraging new development of renewables and aren't engaging in these kinds of practices.
- Purchase RECs from your utility if your utility has a [green power program](#), or from a Green-e certified outside source.

Retail green power plan

A [retail green power plan](#) or [utility green power product](#) is similar in many ways to purchasing renewable energy credits. Depending on where you live, these plans may be provided by your utility or a third party, and allow you to pay extra on your electric bill to support renewable energy. Essentially, you're paying for the utility or third party to purchase a certain amount of green power- the amount and the cost depends on the plan.

Community choice aggregation

[Community choice aggregation](#) (CCA) is a way for a municipality to choose to get their electricity from a different supplier while still using their existing utility's transmission and distribution infrastructure. It's one of many ways municipalities can be [leaders](#) when it comes to solar. CCA is only an option in certain communities, and only certain states allow communities to choose to engage in CCA. Accordingly, a CCA may or may not be an option for you, depending on whether or not your town or city has decided to get involved. If your municipality is part of a CCA, there's also a good chance that you're already subscribed to it. Many CCAs are opt-out by default, meaning you will automatically receive the renewable energy from the program unless you tell the city that you don't want to participate, so you'll be going renewable automatically. If the program is opt-in, it's likely that you'll have received a notice in the mail which will allow you to respond and get involved in the program.

- As of 2023, CCAs are authorized in [10 states](#): California, Illinois, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Ohio, Rhode Island, and Virginia.

Ask your landlord to go solar

If there are no community solar arrays or CCAs in your area that you can subscribe to, another option in addition to RECs, is to ask your landlord or property management company to install solar panels on your home. Convincing your landlord to go solar has the added benefit of directly bringing more rooftop solar onto the grid.

- **Some arguments you have at your disposal include:**

- Solar [saves homeowners money](#). While the upfront cost of solar panels can be steep, even if the solar installations aren't producing all the electricity produced from the property, they'll save on the property owner's electric bill and pay for themselves, on average, multiple times over the course of their lifespan.
- [New incentives](#) from the Inflation Reduction Act make it cheaper than ever for homeowners to purchase solar. Property owners can deduct [up to 30%](#) of the cost of solar installation off of their federal income taxes.
- Adding solar to a property can increase its [resale value](#), making it a good investment even beyond the direct savings offered.
- Solar can attract [environmentally minded tenants](#), as well as make a property more attractive to tenants by reducing their electric bill.
- Solar and storage can keep the lights on during blackouts, if set up with a [microgrid](#).

Use portable solar panels

Portable or ["DIY"](#) solar panels are a way that renters can get some of the benefits of solar without installing rooftop solar. These panels cannot be connected to the grid, and so would be used to charge small devices directly.