

10 Steps to Take Before Installing Solar

Consider these steps as you explore whether solar is right for you:

1. Make your home energy efficient.

By adding insulation, sealing air leaks and completing other basic energy efficiency improvements, you immediately cut energy costs and can reduce the size of the solar energy system you purchase. West Florida Electric Cooperative (WFEC) offers free energy audits to target efficiency upgrades that can help lower your energy consumption. You may even find that energy efficiency investments are a better value than purchasing a solar energy system.



2. Research, research, research.

Our experts can answer basic questions, provide resource materials and direct you to reputable sources for additional information.

3. Understand how a solar energy system interconnects with your electric cooperative distribution system.

Most rooftop solar energy systems are designed to provide you with a portion of the electricity needed to power your home but won't provide 100 percent of your needs. You will still rely on West Florida Electric to supply a portion of your energy needs.

At night and on cloudy days (and possibly other high-use times), you'll need more power than your system can produce.



Also remember that electrical codes require the solar inverter to shut down during a power outage, which means that you cannot rely on your solar array for backup power.

Each utility – including West Florida Electric– sets policies and rates for connecting rooftop solar systems to their lines. As you evaluate rooftop solar systems, ask us about safety precautions, rate structure and interconnection requirements.

4. Understand your co-ops policy on purchasing energy from members.

West Florida Electric does not pay full retail price for energy its members produce with solar energy installations. Instead, WFEC pays a rate of 5.2 cents per kilowatt-hour. This

“avoided cost” represents the energy costs that the cooperative avoids because a member generates it with their own system. Avoided cost is different than the full retail price that includes additional expenses for power lines, poles, transformers and other equipment necessary to serve co-op members.

5. Tally upfront costs.

Most electric cooperatives do not sell, install or maintain rooftop solar systems, so you will purchase a system from a contractor who is not affiliated with West Florida Electric. As the owner, you are responsible for the purchase price, as well as ongoing maintenance and repair costs for the life of the system.

It pays to spend time calculating these expenses, which may include installation, interconnection costs (the cost of connecting it to WFEC’s distribution system), insurance, taxes and others. In the “credit” column of your price comparisons, include incentives, rebates and tax credits you may qualify for.

6. Research for incentives, rebates and tax credits.

Financial incentives could help reduce investment costs. Opportunities vary by location, and many have expiration dates. Visit www.dsireusa.org for a list of federal and local incentives, credits, grants, loans and rebates.



7. Accept short- and long-term responsibilities.

Before you buy, make sure you know your responsibilities.

If you purchase a rooftop solar system, you'll need to meet the requirements of WFEC's interconnection agreement. That includes paying any costs associated with connecting to the co-ops distribution system.

As the solar system's owner, you'll be responsible for maintenance and system repairs.

8. Follow all safety precautions.

Most rooftop solar systems are connected to the electrical grid. Because of the two-way flow of electricity, excess energy generated by your solar system flows onto the co-ops distribution lines. This shoulders you with the responsibility for the safety of our linemen and others who may come into contact with power lines. Improper connection and maintenance of your solar system may endanger people and the reliability of the grid.



9. Choose a reputable contractor/installer.

Start with a list of optional contractors from local and state Better Business Bureaus, renewable energy associations, Florida's energy office or Florida's Attorney General's office. Contact several contractors appearing on your list, especially if recommended by multiple experts.



Ask many questions, check out other installations the contractor has completed, compare at least three bids and thoroughly check references. If possible, ask a contract specialist or attorney to review the contract before signing.

10. Maintain good records.

Keep files on your pre-purchase research and pre-installation data, as well as bids, contracts, inspection reports, maintenance records and all other details about the system. It's also a good idea to set up a system to track and compare your actual system performance with predictions provided by the contractor/installer.