



Home vs. Community Solar.



Home vs. Community Solar

What's the difference between home solar and community solar gardens?

Home solar typically refers to privately owned and stationed solar panels on your rooftop or hosted on your property. Community solar gardens (CSGs) are a way to “rent” available solar as a member of a community. Here's how each system works:

A home solar system is one in which you have solar panels installed on the roof of your home or ground-mount them somewhere on your property. Depending on the level of sunshine in your area and the maximum output achievable by your system, the energy generated is enough to take care of most of your home energy needs. In most cases, you own or lease the solar panels, either through direct purchase or financing, and you reap the benefits that come along with ownership. Once the cost of the panels and their installation have been paid for, all energy savings will accrue directly to you for as long as the system is in place.

Community solar gardens (CSGs) typically include a much larger solar array, and instead of being owned by an individual who uses the energy produced, they are owned by a community or third party whose electricity is shared by participating community

members. Community solar allows members of a community the opportunity to enjoy a few of the benefits of solar power without needing to install solar panels on their property. As long as you're a member of CSGs you reap the rewards of the energy produced as a credit on your electric bill.



Learning More: An interview with Dan Theide, Clean Energy Resource Team Communications Director

Dan Theide works as communications director for Clean Energy Resource Teams (CERTs), an organization whose mission is to connect individuals and communities in Minnesota to the resources they need to identify and implement community-based clean energy projects.

CERTs directly staffs and engages with steering committees in each of the seven regions in Minnesota. They also offer outreach and education opportunities to guide clean energy projects.

While you may be eager to install solar panels at your residence, he cautions that step one is understanding if your property is a good fit for on-site solar. “The best solar site is one that has open southern exposure and is unobstructed by other houses or trees,” he says. If you have a beautiful yard full of trees and they provide nice shade that you enjoy, your house might not be the best option for home solar. “In my case, my house was not a super-great candidate for rooftop solar, so we subscribe for 100 percent of our energy needs from a

community solar garden,” he says. Renters may also be interested in the CSG option, perhaps while still trying to convince a landlord that rooftop solar could be a good long-term solution.

Theide says that while a CSG has been the right solution for his family, others may want the home solar option if it’s at all possible for them. “The project costs have come way down, and most people aren’t paying for it all up front, but are arranging financing like you might do for any major purchase. Then, once you pay it off, the rest is just gravy—you have free, clean electrons flowing in all the time.”

"The project costs have come way down, and most people aren't paying for it all up front, but are arranging financing like you might do for any major purchase."

Dan Theide

Clean Energy Resource Teams

Learning More: Continued

If you are unable to install home solar panels, you can begin to search for a CSG. “There needs to be a project available, so you need to look for that,” he says. “And as with any homeowner project, you should get a couple quotes and compare options.”

Another option, he says is to opt in for your utility company’s green pricing program. This is usually regarded as a final option. “For most people, that’s an easy button to push. You just let them know you want the green energy choices. There might be a slight premium over traditional pricing, but it’s probably about the cost of a fancy coffee once a month—and you’ll have the peace-of-mind of knowing you have 100 percent clean energy at home.”

Rooftop Vs. Community Solar	Rooftop Solar	Community Solar
<i>Where solar power is produced</i>	<i>Your own property</i>	<i>Off-site solar farm</i>
<i>Upfront costs</i>	<i>Varies by system size and location</i>	<i>\$0</i>
<i>Overall savings</i>	<i>\$20,000 to \$97,000</i>	<i>5-20% on electricity costs</i>
<i>Ownership and incentive eligibility</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i>
<i>Environmental benefits</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>Yes</i>



How CSGs work, and how you pay for them

Over the past several years, shared renewables through community solar has grown quickly among mainstream consumers.

As of January 2023, 22 states and the District of Columbia have enacted legislation that enables or requires community solar. Of that group, 17 states have passed provisions to address low-income participation in community solar. Although 42 states plus Washington, D.C. have solar projects in operation as January 2023, roughly 75% of all community solar projects in the United States are concentrated in just four states, Florida, New York, Minnesota, and Massachusetts.

In most areas, consumers have the option to invest in either home solar or community solar, but not both concurrently, as utility companies typically prohibit dual participation. This restriction arises from the long-term nature of community solar agreements, which typically extend over 25 years. Therefore, it's imperative for consumers to conduct thorough research before determining the most suitable option for their needs.

In opting for community solar, consumers enter into an agreement with a third-party provider, resulting in dual electric service providers: the utility company (e.g., Xcel Energy) and the community solar company. Consequently, participants will receive separate electric bills from each entity on a monthly basis. This distinction underscores the importance of carefully considering the implications and logistics of subscribing to a community solar project versus pursuing home solar installation or other energy options.



Getting started with solar

First, you'll want to have a solar audit of your home conducted. This will determine whether or not your house is primed for solar panel installation and will assist you in preparation if any is needed.

You'll be asked for details about your roof, your garage roof, and other available space. You'll discuss your current energy usage, the age of your shingles and the availability of any incentives, if applicable. And you'll want to have a thorough discussion of financing options.

You can also determine if you're a good candidate for home solar by checking out the Minnesota Solar Suitability Analysis app, which will allow you to see how much sun your rooftop gets. The app is easy to use—just enter an address in the search box or click the button to use your current location. You can also see existing installations and other features by clicking the layers button. Or if you live outside of Minnesota visit EnergySage.com to use their solar panel calculator to quickly estimate your solar potential and savings by address.

Whether you decide to go with home solar or a CSG, be sure to shop around, ask for recommendations, read contracts and get all the information you can before making a decision.

If you opt for CSG, you'll want to find out if there are subscriptions available to you, through resources like sharedrenewables.org along with gaining an understanding of the associated cost for participation. The amount of electricity you use helps you decide how much solar to get. In most states, your solar garden subscription can cover up to 120 percent of your annual electricity usage.



All Energy Solar is headquartered in Saint Paul, Minnesota, with local teams that support installations throughout the Upper-Midwest and East Coast. We have helped thousands of property owners across the country control their energy costs with solar electricity.

Now installing a brighter, Cleaner future.

All Energy Solar is a trusted leader in the solar energy industry. We provide clean, green, solar energy solutions for residential, commercial, agricultural, and government clients.

Our team of industry professionals have been focused on providing long term, trusted relationships since 2009.

Our industry experience allows us to confidently handle every aspect of the solar process. From initial energy analysis and concepts, engineering and design, construction, and monitoring, our team prides itself on being experts in all aspects in our field.



