

How To Find The Best Solar Contractor For Your Home



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Residential solar power is an increasingly affordable way to slim your energy bills and reduce greenhouse gas emissions at the same time.

The key to a successful installation, of course, is choosing the right solar contractor.

A good installer will provide turnkey service, and help you take a whole-house approach to improving your energy efficiency.

Remember that the best contractors facilitate the entire installation process for you, from determining how many solar panels you need, to getting you all the credits and rebates available on the federal, state and local levels.

Professional and Experienced

The solar industry is constantly changing with advances in solar technology, solar financing and solar service. Homeowners should make sure that their contractor is up to date on all the latest technology and financing options. There are several trade associations and solar advocate non-profits that provide industry-related news, information and education to solar contractors.

A professional solar provider may be associated with organizations such as the Solar Energy Industries Association (SEIA), a respected national trade association with 1,000 member companies. SEIA partners with The Solar Foundation, a non-profit, in research and education outreach programs. Ensuring that a solar contractor is associated with organizations within the industry is one way to ensure a contractor is professional and experienced. In addition, a professional solar contractor will be happy to supply references from other customers.

Solar Accreditation

While some states do not require certification for residential installations, most rebate and credit incentive programs require that a solar contractor be

certified through the North American Board of Certified Energy Practitioners (NABCEP) for photovoltaic (PV) and solar thermal certification. Homeowners who wish to take advantage of the federal incentives, in particular, should inquire about NABCEP certification.

Clear and Thorough

A professional solar contractor will facilitate the solar installation process from beginning to end. The service may start with an evaluation of a homeowner's solar power needs, including analysis of current usage and site inspection. The contractor should help you examine your utility bills over the past 12 months, identify sources of inefficiency within your home, and provide an accurate picture of just how much you can save with solar.

Flexible Services

A good solar contractor will be able to work with you to ensure that the system is affordable through a variety of financing options, and by determining which solar system will provide the most economic benefit. In addition, your solar contractor should know what other inspections may be needed by cities and utilities, as well as paperwork required by local permit offices. Solar contractors typically assist you in qualifying for and receiving governmental solar rebates and tax incentives, and may even credit you with any rebates upfront.

Maintenance and Monitoring

As for the technical side of things, many solar providers will monitor service to ensure systems continue to operate at peak performance. A good contractor will advise homeowners upfront as to what maintenance services are included, and some solar contractors will provide any necessary service for the life of the system. This is why it's important your

contractor is qualified to design, install and maintain your system well into the future.

While homeowners may be expected to make a down payment, depending on the type of financing option chosen, as with any work contracted for the home, a good contractor will never demand full payment before the system is completely installed.