



Solar panels battery storage systems

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Everyone's looking for a way to keep the lights on when the power goes out. With increasingly intense weather knocking the power grid offline for days at a time in some regions, traditional fossil-fuel-based backup systems--namely portable or permanent generators--seem increasingly unreliable. That's why residential solar power combined with battery storage (once an esoteric niche industry) is rapidly becoming a mainstream disaster-preparedness choice, according to more than a dozen installers, manufacturers, and industry experts we interviewed.

For homeowners, multi-kilowatt batteries that charge from rooftop solar panels promise resilience in the event of a natural disaster--a reliable, rechargeable, instantaneous source of electricity to keep important devices and appliances running until the grid comes back online. For utilities, such installations promise a more stable and lower-carbon electrical grid in the near future. Here's how you can set it up for your home. (Just brace yourself for sticker shock.)

Fundamentally, though, all of the batteries work the same way: They store power from rooftop solar panels as chemical energy during the day, and then they release it as needed (most commonly at night, when the solar panels are idle, as well as during power outages) to keep your home's appliances and fixtures running. And all batteries charge only via DC (direct current) power, the same sort that solar panels produce.

But beyond that, there are many differences. "Batteries are not made the same," Aggarwal said. "They have different chemistries. They have different wattages. They have different amperes. And how much amperage can be extracted from a battery at a given time, i.e., how many appliances can I run concurrently? There is no one-size-fits-all."

The first is whether you'll be installing a new solar system at the same time that you install battery storage, or whether you'll be retrofitting a battery to an existing system.

If you already have a solar array and want to install a battery, the big news is simply that you can now do so. "I've been doing this for 20-something years, and being able to go in and look at a system and retrofit it is amazing," said Rebekah Carpenter of Fingerlakes Renewables. "I remember when there was absolutely no option to retrofit a system. You just weren't going to be able to use solar at all if the grid went down."

Do you really need to spend a ton of money to meet your needs in a power outage? There are less-expensive options than high-kilowatt solar storage, including portable gasoline generators, lithium-ion portable power stations, and small solar battery chargers aimed at keeping devices running.



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