Solar panels on the ground

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A ground-mounted solar power system is just what it sounds like - a system of solar panels installed at ground level, rather than on the roof of your house. Depending on your choice of racking system, the solar...

Ground-mounted solar panels are free-standing solar arrays installed at the ground level rather than on the rooftop and are supported with a pole or a metal frame. Both the ground-mount and rooftop-installed solar...

Put simply, it is what it sounds like: solar panels mounted closer to the ground than a typical roof mounting. They're generally mounted either to posts or racks that are anchored to the ground. You typically won't find panels literally on the ground, but rather tilted at an angle to face the sun and at least a few feet above the surface to allow for air to flow around them and water underneath.

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There's more to it than that, though that's the gist. Ground-mounted solar panels have some advantages over rooftop panels, but come up short elsewhere.

Most standard ground-mounted solar arrays involve metal framing that is driven into or secured to the ground, typically with cement. There are any number of configurations that can be achieved using various racking and mounting systems.

Standard mounting is a great option when access to the panels is a priority. This can be useful in locations that receive a lot of snow, or in situations where servicing, adjusting or replacing the panels is anticipated.

Ground mounting is also often selected simply because rooftop mounting isn't an option for some reason. It's possible but very unusual to install tracking systems on standard ground mounts due to the degrees of freedom required to rotate the panels to track the sun as it moves across the sky daily, and higher and lower during the course of a year. That said, racking systems can allow for some basic seasonal adjustments in tilt.

A primary reason for putting a rack of solar panels atop a single pole rather than a standard support structure is to allow for the use of a tracking system that can maximize the amount of power produced.

Typically a pole is driven into the ground permanently and a rack of tracking-equipped panels are affixed to the top. Trackers are usually a combination of sensors and motors that rotate the panels to follow the path of the sun across the sky. This means the panels can be pointing at the morning sunrise in the east and track that big ball of fire throughout the day until it sets below the opposite horizon. Ideally such systems will also tilt to

accommodate the varying height of the sun between seasons.

The true advantage of ground-mounted panels is that they don't have to go on your roof. If your house is in a nice, shady spot but you've got a sunny backyard, you can put them there.

Rooftop panels are also captive to your roof design, which may not be ideal since solar panels work best at a specific slope and direction. While the optimum tilt depends on your latitude, the best direction is basically toward the equator. Since most roofs weren't designed with solar panels in mind, they likely aren't perfectly positioned to maximize solar energy production. A ground-mounted system can be ideally positioned.

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