

# Solarizing Your Home

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When people think of making homes run on solar energy, it is common to assume they have to have expensive solar panels installed. Although solar panels are a great way to conserve energy, they aren't the only way to incorporate solar energy into your home.

There are many ways to go solar without spending a lot of green. Environmentally friendly products have increased in popularity and there are a wide variety from which to choose. Whether it is a solar flower, butterfly, gnome, solar fountain, birdbath, patio umbrella or pool cover, a single solar product can make a difference in the environment (and on your energy bill).

## Outdoor Solar Lighting

For instance, switching to solar outdoor lighting can save costs, prevent emissions released into the environment, and can be easy to install, maintain and use. Solar light products can be used for patios, decks, entranceways, workshops, security lights or spotlights. There are even solar-driven motion detector lights available.

Many of these products provide as many as two years of solar-fueled light. Their rechargeable batteries get 100,000 hours of operating time before they need to be replaced.

Take the time to research different brands. Some solar lighting, for

example, provides fairly bright ambient lighting along walkways and for driveways, while others provide a dimmer light. Some are "warmer" (more yellow); others are "cooler" (more green).

Know where you plan to place such lights, and how many of hours of sunlight that area receives, and then make sure it's enough sun exposure to "light" the light fixtures you are choosing.

Determine if you need a solar device that stores solar energy. For example, some solar fountains only work when the sun is shining directly on them, while others store solar energy so that they can continue to run after the sun passes. Check before you buy.

## Pool Heaters

Solar pool heaters are often the most cost-effective options when it comes to solar products. They can pay themselves off within a couple years. The solar pool heaters can often work for up to 20 years, whereas auxiliary heaters that run on natural gas, propane, oil or electricity are expensive to operate and break down more often.

Solar heating is a great way to ensure pleasant water temperature. The systems work in warmer months by circulating warm water through the pool at night. This counteracts cooling due to surface evaporation

because the sun's rays are the strongest during the months when people use their pools the most.

There are also solar pool covers that consist of Thermo-Tex® technology that maximizes the heating ability to absorb thermal energy. They are also effective in keeping indoor pools warmer because they minimize heat loss. The pool covers help to make pools cleaner, warmer, and reduce water evaporation as well as chemical usage.

A solar pool cover can last several years. The pool covers are designed using UV-stabilized polyethylene, polypropylene or vinyl to resist deterioration. The covers are similar to bubble packing material, but use a thicker quality of plastic that has UV inhibitors. The vinyl covers have a stronger material so they last longer than the bubble covers. There are also insulated vinyl covers available with a thin layer of flexible insulation between the two layers of vinyl.

Solar products are not only a good way to protect planet Earth but they can often save buyers time and money. Because the interest is increasing in alternative forms of energy, these and many other products are becoming readily available and less expensive. So do your part to help the environment by looking for alternative solar options both inside and outside the home. SM