

California Dreamin'

Building & Installation Details

I installed a solar hot water system in December 2012 on the roof of my townhouse condo in W. Cambridge. I live in a 5-unit condominium grouping made up of 4 townhouse units and a single unit that is a historically significant farmhouse from the late 19th century.

The orientation of our building is not optimal for a bigger installation as we have many sloping roofs in different directions. Also, my condo neighbors are in different places as far as being ready to get involved with solar at this point, so it made the most sense for me to do a solar hot water installation on my own. Perhaps at some time we'll expand to a bigger system for our 5 households?

The Installers

My installation was handled by Jamie Leef and Eric Stolz of S & H Construction. I can't say enough about S & H! They were real professionals and took care of everything as well as educating me along the way. The only surprise to me was the need to keep the old traditional hot water heater as well as the new one, so I had to clean out more of the cellar than I had planned, in a hurry!

Results

I benefited greatly from a grant from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts (\$1900) as well as from the Cambridge Energy Alliance (\$2000). The total cost of my installation was \$9100, so my out of pocket cost was \$5000. My hot water costs vary according to when my young adult children are home, or when my household consists of just me and my beagle (who doesn't take a lot of showers). I estimate my payback time at about 8—10 years.

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My brother lives in Santa Barbara CA and has solar panels which generate all his electricity; he was my inspiration to pursue solar in our New England location. All things considered, I think we are doing quite well in beginning to use renewable energy in our little Cambridge condo.

