

Q&A Table  
Solar lease

Location (City, State)	Fort Collins, Colorado
Size of system	3.6 kW
Year installed	2012
Grid-tied or stand alone?	Grid-tied
Estimated kWh generated/year	4,370
Percent of electricity use from solar	80%
Electric bill before and after installation (optional)	About \$50/month before and after (but most of that is now paid to the solar installer, not the utility)
Payback period (optional)	Immediate (\$0 money down)
What made you decide to go forward with the project?	I care about the environment and wanted to do my part to reduce my greenhouse gas emissions at a cost I could afford. I realized my house had a great orientation (south) with very little shade, I got a very competitive offer from a leasing company, and I went for it!
What made you choose a lease as opposed to a purchase?	I didn't have cash and wasn't interested in getting a loan for the purchase of a system. I also like the fact that my provider offers insurance and maintenance as part of the lease agreement, so I don't have to think about it.
Can you explain how your lease works?	I paid \$0 upfront and make a fixed monthly payment to the lease provider. My payment is fixed for 20 years so when utility rates increase I will still be paying my fixed amount. Plus, my fixed monthly rate has equaled what I would've paid for utility-provided electricity from Day 1 anyway.
How was the system sized?	The lease provider and I looked at my electricity use history over the past year and estimated the size system needed to offset 100% of my use. I decided to go with a slightly smaller system than would be needed to offset all of my current electricity use since I hope to become even more efficient in the coming years.
How long did the install take/were there any snafus?	The install took less than one day. My inverter wasn't working properly right away, though, so they had to come back to fix it within the week and I haven't had any problems since.
What was the paperwork like with the installer/utility to make this happen?	It was pretty straightforward and I utilized a scanner to sign and send back 4-5 documents via email over the course of the month or so between when I first agreed to the lease and the actual installation. I only had to interact with my lease provider, not my utility.
Did you take advantage of any financial incentives/tax credits for the project?	Because the project was a lease, only the solar provider was able to take advantage of financial incentives, but those savings were passed on to me as their customer.

Has the performance met your expectations, including financially?

So far output has been a little below what I thought it would be, but it hasn't been a full year yet and I'm expecting more generation this summer than I've seen previously. That said, the electricity generated should meet the annual minimum number of kilowatt-hours guaranteed in my contract. If it doesn't I get paid the difference. My financial expectations have been met as I did a lot of homework beforehand.

Did you learn any lessons you'd like to share with others who might be considering a similar project?

I wasn't sure if my provider offered a site visit before entering into the lease. I got another quote from a provider that did conduct a site visit so I felt okay about going with the more competitive quote despite not getting a site visit from that provider. I would recommend getting multiple quotes, reading through the lease proposal thoroughly and asking lots of questions, and getting at least one site visit before signing on the dotted line. That said, I'm very happy I did it and enjoy generating solar electricity for my home at a great price!

*The system is made up of (15) 240 watt panels for a total of 3,600 watts (3.6 kW) of peak power. The "missing tooth" is where a vent protrudes out of the roof.*



*This shows the conduit running from the rooftop panels into the inverter (right) which changes the electricity from DC to AC and which also provides a lot of useful information about the system and its production. The meter in the center measures the total output of the system over its lifetime. The meter on the upper left is the net meter which accounts for generation minus use over the lifetime of the system.*



*From October 2012 to June 2013 we've used 1,290 more kWh than we've generated. This is because we didn't size the system to fully meet our current use (we hope to decrease our use). The winter months also typically generate less than the summer months. June was the first month in which we generated more electricity than we used and this excess will carry over into future months.*



*From October 2012 to June 2013 our system generated 3,323 kWh. If you add the 1,290 that we used above what we've generated (net) we can calculate that of the total 4,613 kWh we've used since October we've generated 72% with solar PV. We expect this to climb closer to 80% over the course of the first full year.*



*Paying \$36.60/month for our lease means that we've spent \$329.40 for 3,323 kWh, or about \$0.099/kWh – slightly less than our retail rate. Our monthly payment is locked in for 20 years and includes insurance and maintenance!*