



# Solar Water Heating

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<http://info.cat.org.uk/solar-water-heating>

## Solar water heating or solar electricity?

There are two rather different technologies that each use roof-mounted panels to collect solar energy.

This information sheet is about solar water heating (sometimes called solar thermal) technology, an efficient way to heat water needed for showers, baths and hot taps.

For information on using photovoltaic (PV) solar electric panels to generate electricity to run domestic appliances, see instead our free sheet on **Solar Photovoltaics**.

## How does solar water heating work?

A solar water heating (SWH) system consists of three major components:

1. One or more solar collectors (tubes or panels, usually mounted on a roof),
2. A pump connected to a controller
3. A hot water cylinder with two heating coils (called a twin-coil cylinder).

The collector uses the energy in sunlight to heat a thermal fluid (water with antifreeze). If the fluid in the collector is hotter than the water in the cylinder, the controller turns on the pump to circulate fluid to the coil in the cylinder, and heat the water there.

The upper heating coil in the cylinder is connected to the main central heating boiler (for example a gas boiler), and this will finish heating up the hot water when there isn't enough sunshine (as in winter).

## Is my home suitable for SWH?

Solar collectors facing anywhere between south-east & south-west, at an angle of between 20 and 50 degrees, will give the best performance. However, even an east of west facing panel can still be worthwhile – it just needs to be about 20-25% bigger. Figure 2 (next page) illustrates how SWH performance varies with tilt and orientation.

Rooftop panels are the most common, but they can also be mounted at ground level.

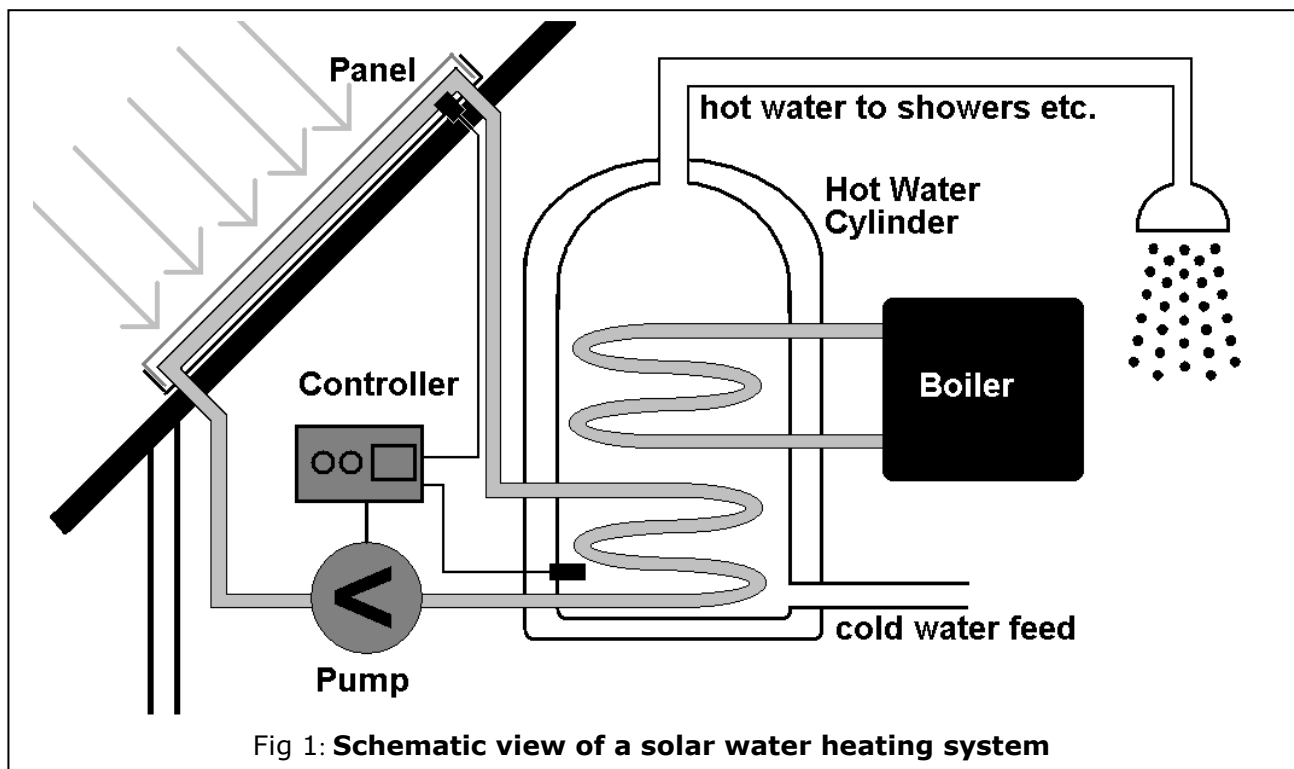
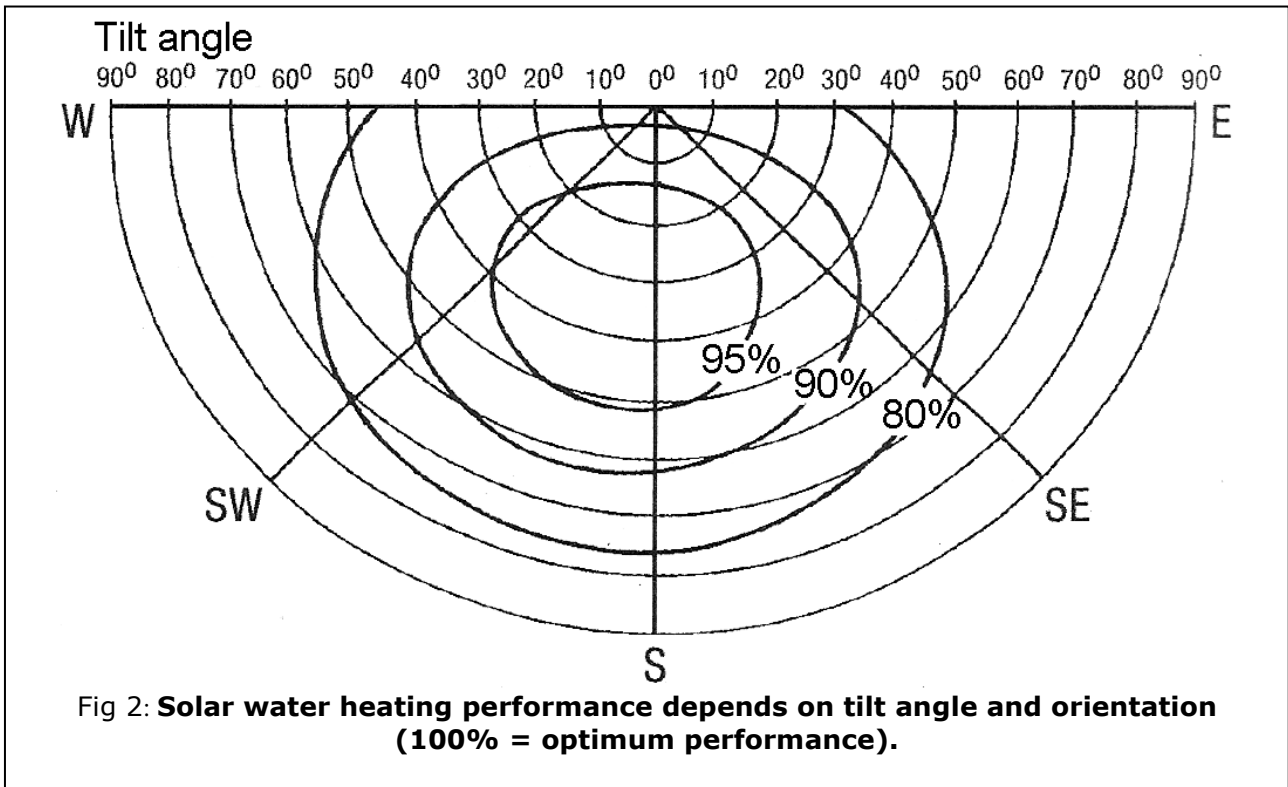


Fig 1: Schematic view of a solar water heating system



Because SWH gradually heats the water in the cylinder, it's difficult to add it to a heating system using a 'combi' boiler – one that heats water on demand and so doesn't have a cylinder. Only a few combis accept pre-heated water, so you'd need to check with the manufacturer and installer to see if your combi system could be adapted.

Roof mounted panels are usually a 'permitted development', so you won't need to apply for planning permission. However, for National Parks, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, conservation areas and listed buildings, restrictions may apply.

**How many panels will I need?**

As a rule of thumb, you'll need about 1 square metre (m<sup>2</sup>) per person to give enough hot water through the summer. The installer will assess your hot water needs and size the system accordingly. This will also involve sizing the solar cylinder, which will usually be double the size (much taller) of a standard cylinder – this gets the best performance from the solar panels.

**Which collector type should I chose?**

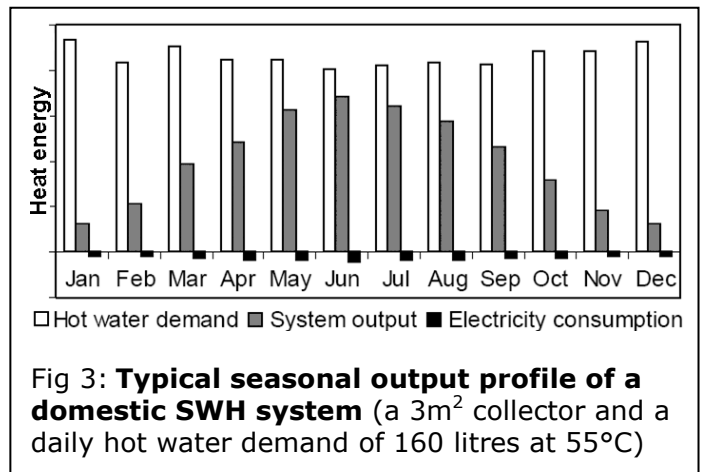
Two types are typically used: 'flat plate' or 'evacuated tube' collectors. Both have their strength and weaknesses - for example, evacuated tubes perform better on cold sunny days and flat panels protrude less from the roof. However, overall they will deliver similar value for money.

**How much hot water will I get?**

In the UK, a solar water heating system should meet 40% to 60% of domestic hot water demand (showers, hot taps, etc). As Fig. 3 shows, most of this is in the summer. Because solar radiation is much weaker in winter, SWH will not produce enough hot water in winter, and it will not help with space heating (such as radiators).

**What's the likely cost?**

A roof-mounted SWH system should cost between £3,000 and £5,000. As a big part of this cost is for plumbing and scaffolding, you may be able to save by installing SWH while carrying out other repair work, or when it's integrated it into a new building.



### **Does SWH make financial sense?**

A domestic solar water heating system typically reduces gas, oil or electricity bills by between £50 and £100, depending on how much hot water it produces what fuel it replaces. To help make SWH financially attractive and boost development of the industry, the government has put in place the Renewable Heat Incentive (RHI). See the box below for more about this.

### **Further Information:**

See our website for answers to common questions about solar water heating, and for a video case study of a system:

<http://info.cat.org.uk/solar-water-heating>

### **Energy Saving Trust**

☎ 0300 123 1234; [www.est.org.uk](http://www.est.org.uk)

Advice on energy efficiency measures and details of grants and support, including the support available for renewable energy systems through the RHI.

### **How do I find an installer?**

To qualify for RHI payments you need to use installers and equipment accredited through the Microgeneration Certification Scheme (MCS). You could also check if the installer belongs to a professional body that promotes high standards. Do always get a few quotes to compare.

### **Microgeneration Certification Scheme**

☎ 020 7090 1082

[www.microgenerationcertification.org](http://www.microgenerationcertification.org)

Details of all RHI-accredited installers.

### **Solar Trade Association**

☎ 020 3637 2945; [www.solar-trade.org.uk](http://www.solar-trade.org.uk)

### **The Institute of Domestic Heating & Environmental Engineers (IDHEE)**

☎ 01895 820954; [www.idhee.org.uk](http://www.idhee.org.uk)

### **Association of Plumbing & Heating Contractors**

☎ 0121 711 5030; [www.aphc.co.uk](http://www.aphc.co.uk)

### **Chartered Institute of Plumbing & Heating Engineering**

☎ 01708 472791; [www.ciphe.org.uk](http://www.ciphe.org.uk)

## **Solar Water Heating and the Renewable Heat Incentive (RHI)**

The Government's Renewable Heat Incentive (RHI) provides financial support for solar water heating in both domestic and non-domestic buildings.

### **Support for domestic buildings**

All eligible SWH systems are supported financially through tariff payments of 20.06 pence per kWh. These payments will be based on the expected heat output of the system and paid for a seven year period. You will need to have taken basic energy conservation measures to be eligible (such as loft and wall insulation).

A family-size SWH system may contribute 1500kWh of heat per year. At 20.06p/kWh over seven years the tariff payment would then amount to just over £2100. Fuel savings during the first seven years might be between £500 and £800, but these will continue beyond this and will be worth more to you as fuel prices rise.

Total payments and savings should therefore add up to several thousand pounds over the lifetime of the system. Check our website for further news about the RHI, or contact us if you have any questions.

### **Support for non-domestic buildings**

Non-domestic buildings – from a B&B or pub to large public buildings like schools or factories – can receive a tariff payment of 10.44 pence for every kWh of heat produced by the solar panels, measured by a heat meter. So for example, if a hotel's solar water heating system produces 10,000kWh over a year then RHI tariff payments will be about £1000 for that year.

For more information about the RHI, please visit <http://info.cat.org.uk/rhi>



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### **Solar Hot Water: Choosing, fitting & using a system (Lee Rose)**

This book provides a comprehensive introduction to every aspect of solar hot water, including relevant equipment, components, system design and installation and even how to build your own panels. Lee has over 10 years of experience in consulting, training and installation work, field trials, technical research and developmental thinking in the solar thermal industry. He combines this with a passionate personal commitment to making the best use of the earth's most abundant energy resource.

**270 pages, paperback, £12.95.**

## CAT Short Courses

<http://courses.cat.org.uk/> ☎ 01654 704966

12-17 March **2018** ***Energy Provision (including Renewable Energy)***

Aims to give participants an informed understanding of the environmental and social benefits and limitations of the energy generation technologies and energy reduction choices, including solar, wind, hydro, biomass, heat pumps and more.

## CAT's Graduate School of the Environment

<http://gse.cat.org.uk/> ☎ 01654 705953

The GSE offers a range of inspirational postgraduate programmes (full or part time) that mix academic study and hands-on practical learning, including:

**MSc Sustainability in Energy Provision and Demand Management** – Gain the skills needed to get stuck into making renewable energy happen: learn about renewable resources & sustainable energy technologies at CAT and elsewhere, analyse real data, and design systems.

**MSc Sustainability and Adaptation in the Built Environment** - how can buildings be made sustainable, and how can they be designed to take account of the effects of climate change? - issues covered by this course include: energy management and low energy design, sustainable materials, environmental performance assessment and energy provision.

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<http://support.cat.org.uk/> ☎ 01654 705988

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