



From flower power to solar gain

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Whether lighting up the fields or dangling over our gardens, sunflowers are a ubiquitous symbol of joy and happiness at this time of year. No wonder Van Gogh's sunflower canvases went on to become so famous.

There's more to these plucky plants than paintable good looks, though. Sunflower seeds can be used for oil and flour, the stems for paper, the leaves for tea and the petals for dye. Their status as a 'hyperaccumulator' even makes them useful for soaking up toxic materials - which is why you'll find fields full of the flowers near Chernobyl and Fukushima.

The sunflower's hidden benefits give it every reason to stand tall and shine, making it the perfect symbol of another protector of both planet and pocket - solar power!

Solar systems

Last month I wrote about the feeling of joy and freedom that my solar array gives me, magnified by the fact that I'm reducing my CO2 emissions as well as my energy bills.

Having attached several clever devices to my solar system, I am able to utilise every drop of value from my panels. The Eddi heats my water; the Zappi charges my car and the Smart App helps me manage my energy consumption.

Battery power

Battery storage is also an important addition to most home solar systems, for it allows you to capture excess energy, (normally lost back to the National Grid), for domestic use instead. A battery system helps you to manage home energy consumption, reduce energy bills and increase self-reliance.

Reaping rewards

While solar panels and batteries are the two key components of the solar 'trinity'; there is one final piece of the puzzle you may not be so familiar with - solar tariffs. I wrote about these back in January, but so much has happened since then that you might like a reminder of how they work.

Following the closure of the Feed-in-Tariff scheme (FIT) to new applicants last year, the Government recognised the need to pay homeowners and small businesses for the electricity their solar panels had generated, which was then exported back to the Grid. As such, the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) introduced the Smart Export Guarantee (SEG).

The Smart Export Guarantee (SEG) has made it obligatory for licensed electricity suppliers (SEG Licensees) to offer financial

payments to people generating excess solar electricity which they then export back to the Grid. There are some provisos though: you mustn't already be receiving FIT payments; you must have a smart meter and your system has to have been installed in the UK.

SEG Licensees (the companies providing the SEG tariffs) calculate payments using your export meter readings and it's often possible to export to an SEG Licensee that is different to your home or business energy supplier. In other words, you can buy electricity from one provider and sell your exported solar energy to another.

So far, so good. At this point, I would normally include some information as to the financial rewards you might expect to receive by taking advantage of the SEG, however this is something only your supplier (SEG Licensee) can tell you. They determine the rate they will pay, their contract length and other terms. Just go to OFGEM's website and search SEG to find out more.

With many properties exporting a significant amount of excess energy back to the Grid, the ultimate solution, of course, is a battery. This is more valuable than any export payment and only takes a quick call to the team at Mole Energy to find out more.



Sunny side up

Van Gogh's 'Sunflowers' were, according to the artist, painted in three shades of yellow "and nothing else". In contrast, our solar palette of three - Solar PV, Battery Storage and Smart Export Guarantees - offers 'something else'. A colourful array that also includes car chargers, hot water controllers and solar power smart apps.

Protecting both planet and pocket, the bountiful benefits of solar power remind me of the sunflowers that line our fields each summer. Van Gogh was right when he wrote that his paintings communicated 'gratitude'. When I think of sunflowers and solar power, I couldn't agree more.



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