

# Recreational Vehicles



# Solar Packages for RVs

Solar power in an RV frees campers from expensive campsites or loud generators.

The kits give people the opportunity to generate free, sustainable electricity with just a little upfront cost and some technical know-how.

## CHOOSING A SOLAR PACKAGE

The first step to choosing the proper solar package is to know how much power your RV will need. Generally speaking, the more power needed, the more expensive the system will be. A small system, 100-200 watts, will charge phones and run lights and fans. It's usually below \$1,000. Medium-sized systems for boondocking are 300-400 watts and can power laptops and small fridges. Full-blown, fully off-grid power, 500-1,000 watts, can be several thousand dollars but allow campers to live a fully modern life completely off the grid.

## WHAT KIND OF SYSTEM IS RIGHT FOR YOU?

Rooftop RV solar kits are permanent and durable. They're good for people who will consistently use their RV away from hook-ups. Smaller RVs or more flexible families may prefer a portable kit, where the panels are set up wherever the sun is.

## INSTALLATION

Even if you're handy and



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looking to save money, this installation may not be a DIY job for you. Remember, the goal here is to tap into and run your RV's critical electric systems. If you're installing a rooftop unit, you are involving the structural integrity of your RV. This is a job best left to the

professionals. They may even be able to help you tap into tax credits and other incentives for going solar.

## MAINTENANCE

Solar panel maintenance involves periodic cleaning with non-abrasive cleaners,

carefully following manufacturer's instructions to keep your system charging at its most efficient.

Check that any wiring is secure, mounting brackets are tight and, if the RV's roof is involved, that the roof is properly sealed around the

installation. Make sure the battery connections are clean and tight and periodically check the charge controller for error codes or low output. Keep the panels free from debris build-up around the brackets and other components.

# Keep an Eye on Tire Inflation

Commercial vehicles and passenger cars of all sizes have long had tire pressure monitoring systems to help drivers keep an eye on their tires. In RVs, this is even more important as a blowout can have dangerous consequences.

Recreational vehicles are large, heavy vehicles that put a unique strain on tires. Improper loading or inflation can cause them to wear out more quickly, or even worse, blow out on the road.

Tire pressure monitoring systems (TPMS) can monitor tire pressure and temperature to ensure safe operation of RVs.

## SENSOR TYPES

Sensors can be placed on the cap or you can choose flow-through sensors, which allow for tire maintenance without removing the sensor. Systems on the market can watch over anywhere from four to 22 tires, covering RVs and anything else you're towing, such as boats or vehicles. Cap sensors, which are installed on the outside of the tire, are prone to theft or damage while internal sensors may be more difficult to install and replace.



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Some systems allow drivers to set custom pressure thresholds for each tire. This correctly calibrates the system to each RV and the driving conditions.

## MAINTENANCE

Some TPMS solutions are prone to signal interference and larger RV setups may

require a signal booster to ensure communication between the sensors at the back of the vehicle and the monitor in the front. Cap sensors may require regular battery changes.

If the TPMS solution is being installed in the aftermarket, look at systems that can integrate with the RV's existing

safety systems to provide a holistic view of your vehicle's safety.

In addition to installing a TPMS solution on your RV, conduct regular maintenance on your RV tires. This includes regular inspections for damage and cracking. Rotate tires every 7,500 miles to ensure even

wear. Regularly check your RV's weight to prevent putting excess strain on the tires and make sure it's properly loaded with the weight distributed evenly on the chassis. Using tire covers when the RV is parked, especially in direct sunlight, can help increase the lifespan of the tires.

# Tiny Campers but Big Fun

Microcampers are small on space but big on fun, offering campers an easy-to-pull RV option on a much smaller budget than bigger rigs.

There are several options for tiny camping, including pull-behind teardrop campers and even van camping in smaller van models.

## TEARDROP RVs

The teardrop trailer market is expected to reach more than \$2 billion in the U.S. this year and to grow steadily. These little guys are small in stature but are packed with all the amenities of larger RVs. These campers bring the tiny home concept to the road and typically are best for two adults.

They're often very light, meaning you don't need a big truck to tow it. They're designed with sleeping quarters and a galley kitchen, but no in-door bathroom.

## POP-UP CAMPERS

These campers are lightweight RVs with a collapsible roof and soft sides. It expands — or pops up — at the campsite. They're often more affordable than the full RV rig but can leave campers more exposed to the elements due to the soft sides.

Most pop-up campers feature beds that pull out from the sides, a small kitchen area, a



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dinette and may even have a toilet and shower combination. Hard-side models offer more in the way of insulation, both from sound and from the elements.

## VAN CAMPERS

Van campers, all the rage a

few years back, even come in micro sizes. These are compact built on a minivan or compact commercial van platform. They offer better fuel efficiency and easier driving and parking than bigger models and typically have storage, a sleeping area and a small

kitchen. These are best used with a primarily outdoor focus due to the small interior, which is best pretty much just for sleeping.

All these options are flexible camping solutions that provide the perfect platform for big memories. Like all RVs,

though, they require proper maintenance for a long, happy life on the road. Regularly check tires and other components, particularly roof and other seals, and perform maintenance at the manufacturer's recommended intervals.



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# Fractional Ownership

RVs typically run in the thousands and even hundreds of thousands of dollars. With fractional ownership, you can have all the fun at just a portion of the cost.

Services such as Reve, EquiShare and more offer shares in an RV. That means, like a time share, you get to use it for part of the time in exchange

for footing part of the bill.

## **BENEFITS**

Fractional ownership offers a low-cost way to get used to RV ownership, providing access to typically higher-end models with shared upfront, maintenance and insurance costs. Fractional owners can enjoy scheduled usage and professional teams usually perform maintenance, cleaning, and repairs, depending on the level of service you choose.

It eliminates the worry of how to store an RV. Many homeowners or civic associations won't allow RV storage

at home and storing it on a lot can be expensive. With fractional ownership, the company takes care of that.

## **DRAWBACKS**

Because you have just a share of the ownership, you may not get access to the RV exactly when you need it. And because there are many owners, there's also the opportunity for more conflict. It may be difficult to sell your share in the RV, even if it's an emergency, due to the limited market. There may be some difficulty with insurance, depending on your market.

Fractional ownership might be a

good way to try out the RV lifestyle before dropping the cash on a model of your own. It is an option for families on a budget or who may not use their RV enough to justify the cost. Just know what you're buying into.

Some companies set up ownership as an LLC, for instance, and you should be familiar as to how that protects — or doesn't protect — your family.

As with all contracts, read the fine print and choose a company you trust. See that they answer all your questions and be clear on what you expect to get in return for your payment.

# Caring for Your RV's Roof

The top of your RV is rarely seen and even more rarely thought of, but there's a lot going on up there.

Not only is it the literal roof over your head, it's also home to the HVAC, electrical components and even possibly solar packages. Here's how to keep it in the best shape.

## TYPES OF RV ROOFS

Roofs usually come in four types. There's rubber, commonly called EPDM; plastic, usually called TPO; fiberglass and aluminum. Each has its own benefits and drawbacks. Talk to your RV professionals about which roof type is right for you, your climate and the climate where you'll be traveling.

EPDM is a popular roofing material that is more affordable and resistant to water and UV damage. TPO offers better heat reflection and is more resistant to mud and dirt. Fiberglass is rigid and low maintenance, but is heavier and more expensive. Aluminum is a rare option that's very strong. It can be loud during rain.

## REGULAR CARE

Clean RV roofs regularly, usually two to four times per year with a mild detergent and a soft brush (always follow manufacturer instructions). Look at the seams and check for cracks every 90 days or so and apply a UV protectant



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annually. Reseal any vents or other holes in the roof with a compatible sealant.

When in storage, try to park it under cover or use an RV cover to protect it from sun damage. Make sure any cover you choose is designed for RVs to prevent mold.

## PROBLEMS TO CHECK FOR

Some of the most common problems with RV roofs include water intrusion from degraded sealant around vents or other holes in the roof, delamination, cracks from UV damage and tears or punc-

tures from debris.

Check the roof after parking under trees and promptly clear off any debris that's accumulated.

Look for areas where water may be accumulating due to structural issues and work with a professional repair

shop to correct the issue as soon as possible.

Walking on the roof can cause damage; always check to see if your roof is walkable before setting foot on it. If you're not sure, use a ladder to perform checks and regular maintenance.

# Fido, Go Camping!

A family vacation should include the whole family, even the dog. There are several things you can do to make your RV more dog-friendly so the whole family — two-legged and four-legged — can make memories together.

## **BUILD A DOG RUN**

Give your dog a safe outdoor space with a portable exercise pen or other lightweight fencing. Portable fencing or pens might be on the lighter side, so work with your pup on not jumping or pushing against the fence. Use the RV itself for one side of the enclosure, blocking off the bottom with smaller panels so they can't escape underneath it.

Set the pen up in an area with shade and always provide fresh food and water. Never leave your dogs unattended. Make sure you understand your campsite's rules and regulations regarding pets onsite, including any leash laws or fencing restrictions.

## **MAKE YOUR RV A HOME AWAY FROM HOME**

Inside the RV, create a comfortable safe space for your pet. Consider setting up a crate under the dinette or bed, or in another low-traffic



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area. Because RV flooring can be slippery, use area rugs or rubber mats to help dogs move around more safely. For older dogs, RV steps may be difficult to navigate, so consider using a doggy ramp or rubber risers to make it easier for dogs to get in and out.

While driving, use pet

seatbelts or harnesses for safety. Get your pet comfortable with them before you hit the road for your first camping run.

## **PET SAFETY**

Whenever you take your dog away from home, ensure they have proper identification,

such as a tag on their collar and a microchip that's updated with the most recent information. Before leaving them in the RV, make sure windows and doors are properly secured. If you have a larger or more destructive dog, install screen protectors over windows and doors to prevent

pups tearing through them.

Consider investing in a temperature monitor that will allow you to watch the RV temperature when you're away. You can set it to alert you when temperatures get too hot or too cold, making sure your pet stays comfortable and safe.

# Get Your RV Ready for Tailgating

Bringing your RV along for the big game gives you and your crew a comfortable spot to get the party started.

An RV can act as a great home base on game day, providing a climate-controlled respite, a kitchen to prepare a game day feast, and, maybe most importantly, a clean bathroom.

## PRE-TRIP INSPECTION

Just like before every trip, you should do a pre-trip inspection to make sure your RV is ready to roll. Check essential systems, such as fuel for cooking, water, waste tanks, generators and electrical. Make sure awnings are in good shape and that outdoor TVs and sound systems are properly connected and working. Check tires and trailer connectors, too, to prevent any pre-tailgating catastrophes. Make sure batteries are appropriately charged, especially if there's no connection at your tailgate spot.

## TAILGATE PACKING

Once your RV is good to go, it's time to pack up for the tailgate. Include outdoor seating, folding tables and a rug as well as any food items, coolers, ice, and convenience items such as garbage bags, paper towels and cleaning supplies. Once you're on the tailgating grounds, it may be difficult, if



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not impossible, to leave.

Bring portable fans or heaters and blankets to ward off heat or cold and keep a fire extinguisher handy. Be careful of generator fumes and noise. Be mindful of your neighbors and use battery power when you

can. Don't forget trash bags and cans to make clean-up easy.

## DECORATING

Set the tone for your tailgate party with plenty of team-themed decor. String lights

can illuminate your outdoor space and be a festive addition to any tailgate. Consider battery-powered LEDs that change color for more team spirit. Use banners, flags, tablecloths and more to set the tone.

And don't forget games of your own to pass the time until the big game. Pack up yard games such as cornhole, footballs for tossing, horseshoes and more. You can set up outdoor televisions and speakers to watch other games.