

SCIENCE AND THE CONSUMER**● Solar Energy**

Many people turn to solar energy to reduce their use of fossil fuels—a nonrenewable resource—and to limit pollution. Solar energy is abundant, renewable, and pollution-free. It can be expensive to install but can pay for itself over time.

Solar energy is used for heating, cooking, pumping water, and generating electricity. In the United States, about 10,000 homes are powered entirely by solar energy. For small energy needs, solar collectors can be placed on rooftops. For greater needs, large areas of land are needed.

Where Solar Energy Is Used

It is important to consider location when deciding whether to use solar energy. In northern climates, for example, solar energy is usually more expensive than traditional sources of energy. But in southern climates, solar energy can cost the same as other energy sources, or even less.

Currently, less than one percent of the United States' energy supply comes from solar energy, but this may change. President Bill Clinton wants to increase the use of solar energy to reduce our dependence on fossil fuels. His goal is to have one million solar panels installed on roofs around the country by the year 2010.

Your Turn to Think

1. What can solar energy be used for?
2. Name two advantages and one disadvantage of solar energy.
3. Why is location a factor in deciding whether to use solar energy?
4. What factors should you consider in choosing an energy source for your home?