

## Solar garden new option for those who want green power without the hassle

Christina Dickinson Matt Renoux 9 hrs ago

CARBONDALE- In the mountain town of Carbondale, located just outside of Glenwood Springs, Clean Energy Collective founder and president Paul Spencer is helping to start a unique type of community garden he says has never before been tried in the United States.

"We're in the process of building the first clean energy solar facility in the nation," Spencer said.

At this, garden you won't find tomatoes, lettuce or even very many flowers because the only thing being planted are solar panels, some 350 to be exact. They will be bought by some 20 homeowners looking to tap into the energy they make.

"It allows the masses to invest in clean energy," Spencer said.

The reason so many can get involved is that it doesn't matter where you live, or how your house, apartment, or condo is set up, even in a shaded area, Spencer says you can benefit from this solar garden.

"If you have a shaded home and it's not well oriented for solar, you now have a solution," Spencer said.

This solution sends solar energy made at the solar garden back to the utility company in the area. The power company then gives energy credits back to solar garden customers, depending on how much solar they have bought.

"You have a large solar array producing power on behalf of its owners and those owners are fractionally credited on their utility bill," Spencer said.

Recent legislation has helped push this idea to the

forefront in Colorado, and Spencer says they have plans to include the Front Range with even bigger solar gardens planned down the road.

Often people shy away from solar because it can cost a lot, and it is hard to see a return on the investment, but Spencer says the solar garden concept makes getting into solar a lot easier and less expensive.

Spencer says it costs around \$25,000 to install solar in most homes, but for half the price you can buy solar property in a solar garden and get enough energy to all but get rid of your utility bill.

"A typical house uses between 28 to 29 kilowatts a day. In our system, that would require a full 4 watt system so in our area [of] Carbondale. That cost is around 12 thousand dollars to completely power your house for the next 50 years," said Spencer.

Plus, Spencer says, homeowners who buy into a solar garden don't need to worry about where to put all the equipment because it is all off sight, and they don't need to worry about keeping it all maintained.

"We construct the array, we manage it, we maintain it long term. If it's dirty, it gets clean. If something is broken, it gets fixed," Spencer said.

It means very soon Spencer feels hundreds of thousands of homes could take part in the solar garden idea, meaning the sky is the limit for solar power.

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"The sky is the solution as well so it's nice to see full circles," Spencer said.

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