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06 | 16 | 2011 Posted By Suzanne M. Leff

What are Solar Gardens and What Can They Do for Me?

While owners of individual houses and townhomes in homeowners associations may install solar panels on their rooftops (subject to prior association approval), roofs of condominiums are a different story.

We often receive questions from condominium associations regarding owners' rights to install solar panels on the roofs of the condominium buildings. Condominium roofs are common elements and, as such, individual owners do not have the right to place solar panels on them. Solar gardens offer condominium owners an option for receiving many of the same benefits of solar panels otherwise reserved for single family homeowners and townhome owners.

Solar gardens are composed of several solar panels installed at an off-site location somewhere within the local community. Surrounding property owners can buy into these solar arrays and receive financial benefits from energy companies and potential [tax credits](#).

This summer presents an ideal time for owners in Summit County condominium associations to get involved with solar gardens. [Innovative Energy](#) is located in Breckenridge and is working with other alternative energy advocates, such as the [Solar Garden Institute](#), to construct a solar garden in Summit County. Industry partners are organizing an August meeting to discuss the details of the solar garden and gauge community interest.

In addition to the environmental benefits of solar panels, most Summit County homeowners investing in solar garden arrays would receive [financial incentives](#) from Xcel. While the rules governing the Xcel Solar Community will not be available until later this year, Innovative Energy believes the financial benefits will be very comparable to those for solar panels on a single family home. For example, if your home consumes 500 kWh of electricity and your portion of the solar garden produces 300 kWh, you will be billed for only 200 kWh as part of "virtual net metering."

Solar garden opportunities are growing in other counties too. The [Garfield County Community Solar Array](#) recently began operating and providing owners with utility bill credits. According to the

[Garfield County website](#), this 35 acre solar garden “will offset the equivalent of emissions from 140 homes at 100%, or over its lifetime will equal 131 million car miles or 178,000 trees.”

Innovative Energy has not confirmed the exact date of the August solar garden community interest meeting in Summit County, but we will post another blog entry with the meeting information as soon as it becomes available.

For additional information regarding legal rights and solar panels in HOAs, see [Solar Panels: What HOAs Need to Know](#).

Susan Beblavi contributed to the research and writing of this post.