



An Extended Guide · No. 1555

Mowing, Weeds, and Vegetation Under the Panels

Keeping growth from shading
(and nicking) your array

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! Read this first — two honest truths about ground-mount solar

Two honest truths before we start, because they surprise a lot of good folks. First, a ground-mounted solar array is a professional job. It takes a licensed installer, real foundation work in your yard, building and electrical permits, and your utility's approval to connect (that approval is called interconnection). This guide is here to help you understand, plan for, and evaluate a ground mount; it is not a do-it-yourself project, and I never want you digging footings, wiring an array, or opening an electrical panel. Second, a plain grid-tied solar system — roof or ground, without a battery — shuts itself off during a power outage, even in bright sunshine. That is a required safety feature, so the system cannot put electricity onto the lines while the crews are repairing them. If keeping the lights on during an outage matters to you, you will need a battery, and we will talk about that plainly. A ground array sits right down in the grass, so a little thought about what grows under and around it keeps your panels clear, clean, and working their best.

Keeping the green stuff in check

Because a ground mount stands low in the yard, grass and weeds will happily grow up toward the panels if you let them. Managing that growth is simple, and I'll walk you through the easy, low-fuss ways to do it — none of them hard or heavy work.

I'm Bill, and I run Bill's Home Tech here in Portage County, Ohio. For 30-plus years I've helped folks feel at home with the gear on and around their houses, patiently and in plain words. Looking after the ground under a solar array is about the gentlest chore solar hands you, and I want you to feel relaxed about it.

The goal here is modest. We want to keep growth from shading the bottom edge of the panels, keep the area tidy and safe to walk around, and protect the glass and the wiring while we do it. That's the whole job, and there are a few pleasant ways to get there.

★ Not sure what to plant or lay down?

Tell me about your yard — the soil, the sun, how tidy you like things — and I'll help you pick an approach that's easy to live with. Call or text me at (330) 200-8042.

The whole idea in under a minute

If you read nothing else, read this. Here's the heart of tending the ground under your array, in a handful of plain points.

- ❑ Grass and weeds will grow up toward a low ground array if you let them.
- ❑ The worry is simple — growth shading the bottom edge of the panels.
- ❑ Gravel, mulch, or a low ground cover all keep things tidy and clear.
- ❑ Mow and trim carefully — flung stones and sticks can chip the glass.
- ❑ Go easy on weed killers, and keep them away from wiring and connections.
- ❑ On big rural arrays, grazing sheep are a time-honored, gentle mower.
- ❑ None of this is hard — it's light, occasional, feel-good yard work.

✓ Pick your approach once, then coast

The trick is choosing a ground cover you're happy to maintain — gravel, mulch, or a low planting — and setting it up well at the start. Do that, and the season-to-season upkeep is barely a chore at all.

Why what grows there matters

It's tempting to think a few weeds under the panels are harmless. Mostly they are — but there are two good reasons to keep them in check.

The first is shade. The bottom row of panels sits closest to the ground, so even modest growth — tall grass, a leggy weed, a volunteer sapling — can creep up and shadow that low edge. Shade on even part of a panel trims what the array makes, so keeping the base clear quietly protects your production all season.

The second is what a tangle invites. Thick growth right up against the frame gives rodents and other critters cover to nest and hide, and it holds damp against the hardware. Our animals-and-critters guide goes deep on the wildlife side; here, just know that a clear, open base is a less-inviting base.

✓ Think of it as protecting your sun

Every bit of the panel that stays in full sun is a bit that's working for you. Keeping growth off the low edge isn't fussiness — it's making sure the panels you paid for get the light they're there to catch.

The one real hazard: flying debris

There's exactly one thing to genuinely respect when you tidy up around an array, and it's worth a page of its own.

A string trimmer spinning at full tilt can fling a small stone, a wood chip, or a bit of gravel with real force. Aimed at panel glass, that flung debris can chip or even crack it — an expensive bit of carelessness from an otherwise harmless chore. A mower deck can throw debris the same way if its discharge points at the panels.

The fix is easy and it's all in the habit: slow down as you near the panels, keep the trimmer head low and pointed away from the glass, and hand-trim the last few inches right by the frame. Point a mower's discharge chute away from the array every single pass.

! Treat the glass with respect

Flying debris from a string trimmer or mower is the most common way a homeowner damages panels. Never run a trimmer hard right against the glass. Slow down, aim away, and finish the close-in spots by hand — your panels will thank you.

Your choices for what's underneath

There's no single right answer here — just a few good options, each suiting a different yard, budget, and taste. Here they are at a glance.

- **Gravel or crushed stone:** tidy, low-maintenance, nothing to mow.
- **Mulch:** neat around beds and borders, refreshed now and then.
- **A low living ground cover:** a green look that stays short.
- **Managed grass:** the familiar choice — just mowed and trimmed with care.
- **Grazing animals:** sheep keeping a big rural array trimmed for you.

✓ Mix and match is fine

Plenty of folks do a bit of both — gravel or mulch right under the panels where mowing is awkward, and mowed grass or a low cover in the open space around them. Use whatever keeps your particular yard easy to tend.

Gravel and stone: tidy and low-fuss

If you'd rather not mow or trim under the array at all, a bed of gravel or crushed stone is the classic answer — and a favorite for tidy town lots.

Stone under and around the frame means there's simply nothing there to grow tall and shade the panels. It drains well, it keeps mud and splash-back down, and it always looks intentional and cared-for. For many homeowners it's the least-work option going.

The usual approach is a weed-barrier fabric laid down first, with the stone on top, so weeds can't push up through it. A stray seedling may still turn up now and then, but it pulls out in seconds. Your installer can tell you what works with your soil and drainage.

✓ Lay the fabric, save the weeding

Gravel over a good weed fabric is close to set-and-forget. It costs a little more effort up front than bare stone, but it spares you years of pulling weeds out from under the panels. Well worth it.

Mulch and low living ground cover

If you'd like something a touch softer or greener than bare stone, mulch and low ground covers both keep growth short without much fuss.

Mulch — wood chips or bark — gives a neat, finished look, holds down weeds, and keeps moisture even. It does break down over time, so you'll top it up every so often, but that's a pleasant hour's job, not a burden.

Low ground covers

A low-growing living cover — think clover or another short, spreading plant — gives you green underfoot that stays well below the panels. The key word is low: you want something that never reaches up toward the glass. A good local nursery or your installer can steer you to a mix suited to Ohio and to shade under the array.

✓ Low is the whole point

Whatever living cover you choose, pick something that stays naturally short. A plant that wants to grow tall just becomes a mowing chore — and a shade problem — right where you least want one.

The pollinator patch, or 'solar meadow'

Here's a lovely option that's caught on, especially on larger arrays: planting the ground with flowers that feed bees and butterflies.

A low wildflower or pollinator mix under and around the panels turns a plain patch of yard into something that hums with life all summer. It looks wonderful, it helps the bees, and once it's established it needs only a cut or two a year rather than regular mowing.

The one caution is the same as always: choose a low-growing mix, so the blooms stay below the panels and don't shade the low edge. On a bigger rural array there's usually plenty of room for this; on a small town lot it can still edge the array nicely.

✓ Pretty and practical

A pollinator planting is one of those rare choices that's easier on you and good for the yard at the same time. If the look appeals to you, ask your installer whether it suits your site — many are glad to help plan it.

Two kinds of homes, two sets of needs

How you keep the ground clear tends to look pretty different in a tidy town yard than it does out on acreage, simply because of the room you have and the eyes on it.

If you live in town or the suburbs

In town or the suburbs, the array is smaller and the neighbors are close, so most folks lean toward a neat, contained look and an approach that's quick to keep up between weekends.

- Gravel or mulch under the panels keeps it tidy with almost no mowing.
- A crisp, cared-for look keeps the array a good neighbor, not an eyesore.
- Careful trimming matters more up close — watch flung debris and the fence line.
- Check any HOA or township rules on plantings, height, and screening.

If you are out in the country on a well

Out in the country, arrays are often bigger and there's real room to work. That opens up options a town lot can't manage — including letting animals do the mowing for you.

- There's usually room to mow or drive equipment between and around the rows.
- Grazing sheep can keep a large array trimmed — a rural favorite.
- Keep livestock off the frames and posts — see our animals-and-critters guide.
- A low wildflower meadow suits open acreage and helps the pollinators.

★ Big field or small yard, I'll help you plan it

Whether you've got a quarter-acre in town or open pasture, there's an easy way to keep your array clear. Tell me your setup and I'll help you choose. Call (330) 200-8042.

Mowing and trimming without nicking the panels

If you're keeping grass under or around the array, a little technique keeps the job safe for the glass and easy on you.

When you mow, set your path so the deck's discharge always throws clippings and any debris away from the panels, never toward them. Leave a narrow border right around the frame that you finish by hand, rather than charging the mower right up to it.

For that border, a string trimmer is fine as long as you slow down, keep the head low, and hold it so anything it flings goes away from the glass. For the last few inches hard against the posts, a pair of hand shears or grass snips is safest of all — no flung debris, full control.

! Eyes and footing first

Wear eye protection whenever a trimmer or mower is running, keep steady footing on uneven ground, and never reach under a running deck. The array will wait — there's no chore here worth a stumble or a stray stone.

A careful word on weed killers

Reaching for a spray bottle is tempting, but around a solar array it pays to be thoughtful about it.

The big worry with any weed killer is drift. A breeze can carry the spray onto plants you want to keep, onto your soil, or toward the array's wiring and connections, where you never want chemicals settling. Overspray is easy to cause and hard to take back.

If you do spot-treat a stubborn weed, do it on a still day, aim low and close, and keep well clear of the electrical gear. Honestly, though, the tidiest fix is often to skip the chemicals entirely — a gravel bed over weed fabric means there's little to spray in the first place.

! Keep chemicals away from the electrical gear

Never spray weed killer at or near the array's wiring, connectors, conduit, or any electrical box. Aim low, choose a calm day, and when in doubt, pull the weed by hand instead. Gravel and fabric save you the whole worry.

Letting animals do the mowing

On a big rural array, one of the oldest and best tricks is to let livestock keep the grass down for you. It's real, and it works.

Sheep are the classic choice. They're the right height — short enough to walk under most arrays — they nibble the grass down evenly, and they leave the panels and hardware alone. On a large ground array, a small flock can keep the whole thing trimmed with no mower and no fuel.

A couple of cautions. Goats are not the same story — they climb, chew, and rub on everything, so they're a poor fit around panels. And any livestock should be kept from rubbing on the frames and posts; our animals-and-critters guide covers protecting the structure. This is really a rural, larger-array option — it isn't for a small town lot.

✓ The gentlest mower there is

If you've got the land and the interest, grazing sheep under a big array is quiet, tidy, and rather charming. Ask your installer about row spacing and fencing so the animals can move safely around the panels.

Mind the bottom edge

If there's one spot to keep your eye on, it's the lowest edge of the panels — the part that sits nearest the ground.

Because that bottom row is closest to the grass, it's the first thing growth will shade as the season warms up. A stretch of tall grass or a line of weeds along the low edge can quietly cut into your production before you'd ever notice from the house.

So make the low edge your habit-check. Keep a clear band of gravel, mulch, or short cover right along the bottom of the panels, and glance at it now and then through the growing season. Your installer sets how high the panels sit; your job is just to keep that lowest strip clear.

✓ A ten-second glance does it

Every time you're out by the array, take a quick look along the bottom edge. If growth is starting to reach the panels there, that's your cue to trim. Catching it early keeps it a two-minute job.

A simple season-by-season rhythm

None of this is constant work. It's a light, predictable rhythm that follows the seasons — here's the whole year on one page.

- **Spring:** tidy the winter debris, top up mulch or gravel, and catch weeds getting a head start.
- **Early summer:** mow the border and hand-trim close to the posts as growth takes off.
- **High summer:** keep an eye on the low edge, when growth is fastest and shade creeps up.
- **Fall:** clear fallen leaves off the panels and out from under the frame, and cut growth back.
- **Winter:** little to nothing — growth sleeps, and your attention turns to snow instead.

✓ Let winter hand off to our snow guide

Once the growing season ends, vegetation stops being the story and snow takes over. Our snow-and-winter guide picks up right there, with how to keep a reachable array clear in an Ohio winter.

The tools that make it easy

You don't need much, and the right few pieces let you do all of this comfortably from your feet — no kneeling or reaching required.

- A long-handled string trimmer or shears, so you can work standing upright.
- Hand shears or grass snips for the close-in spots right by the posts.
- A soft brush or broom for sweeping clippings and dust off the lower panels.
- A leaf rake and a tarp for gathering trimmings and fallen leaves in fall.
- Sturdy shoes and eye protection any time a trimmer or mower is running.

✓ Comfort keeps you consistent

The easier a chore is on your back and knees, the more likely it gets done. Long-handled tools that let you stand up straight are worth every penny — especially as the years add up. There's no prize for suffering.

What you can do, and what's a pro's job

Tending the ground is squarely a homeowner job — pleasant, even. But there's a clear line where you hand off, and it's worth naming.

The vegetation itself is all yours: mowing, trimming, mulching, planting, laying gravel, pulling the odd weed. None of it needs a professional. This is the friendly, hands-on side of owning a ground array, and most folks rather enjoy it.

The hard line is anything electrical. If, while you're down there, you spot chewed wiring, a loose or hanging cable, a cracked connector, or any damage to the gear, don't touch it — note it and call a professional. Our maintenance guide covers what to watch for. Vegetation is your lane; wiring is a pro's, always.

! See damaged wiring? Hands off, then call

If your trimming ever turns up a chewed or damaged wire, stop, keep yourself and others clear of it, and call a licensed pro. Never poke at, tape up, or try to fix any part of the electrical system yourself.

Ground-cover options side by side

The main choices on one page, to help you see which fits your yard and how much you want to fuss with it.

Option	Upkeep	Good for
Gravel/stone	Very low	Tidy town lots
Mulch	Top up now and then	Beds and borders
Low ground cover	Occasional trim	A soft green look
Wildflower mix	A cut or two a year	Bigger arrays, bees
Grazing sheep	The flock does it	Rural acreage

There's no wrong pick — only what suits your space and how you like to spend a Saturday. Many homeowners blend a couple: stone under the panels, something greener around them.

Keeping it neighborly and tidy

A ground array is out where people can see it, so a little tidiness goes a long way toward keeping everyone happy with it.

A clean, cared-for base — neat gravel, trimmed edges, no jungle creeping up the frame — makes the whole array read as intentional and well-kept. That, more than anything, keeps panels from becoming a sore point with the folks next door.

If you're in a neighborhood with an association, check whether there are any rules about plantings, screening, or how the array looks from the street before you settle on an approach. Most are reasonable, and a tidy install rarely ruffles feathers.

✓ Tidy reads as cared-for

You don't need a manicured lawn — just an array that clearly isn't neglected. A trimmed edge and a clear base tell everyone the system is looked after, which is exactly the impression you want to give.

Common slip-ups to sidestep

A few easy missteps come up again and again. Knowing them ahead of time is half the battle.

- Letting the grass at the low edge grow tall and quietly steal your sun.
- Running a string trimmer right up against the glass — an easy way to chip it.
- Spraying weed killer on a breezy day so it drifts onto plants, soil, or gear.
- Piling mulch or soil so high it buries the base of the posts and traps damp.
- Forgetting the far, hard-to-reach corner until it's grown into a jungle.

✓ Small and regular beats big and rare

Every one of these comes from letting things slide too long. A few minutes now and then keeps growth from ever getting ahead of you — and keeps the chore small, easy, and safe for the panels.

Questions worth asking up front

A few good questions at planning time make the ground much easier to look after later. Bring these to your installer.

Q: How high off the ground will the bottom edge of the panels sit?

This tells you how much room you'll have to work underneath and how soon growth would start to shade the low row. A little height makes upkeep noticeably easier.

Q: What do you suggest we put under and around the array here?

A good installer has seen many yards and can suggest gravel, mulch, a low cover, or grazing to suit your soil, your site, and just how tidy you want it to be.

Q: Is there room to mow or graze between and around the rows?

On a larger array the row spacing decides whether you can get a mower through or let animals graze. It's a handy thing to settle before the frame ever goes in.

✓ Plan the ground, not just the panels

The best time to make upkeep easy is before the array is built. A thoughtful installer plans the ground cover and access right alongside the panels — so ask, and you'll thank yourself for years.

Common Questions

The questions I hear most about grass, weeds, and what grows under a ground array.

Q: Will weeds really hurt my solar?

Not the panels themselves, but growth that climbs up and shades the bottom edge quietly trims your production, and a weedy tangle gives critters cover. Keeping the base clear is easy and well worth it.

Q: Can I just spray everything with weed killer?

I'd go easy. Overspray drifts onto plants you want, and you never want chemicals near the wiring or connections. A gravel bed over weed fabric often saves you the spraying altogether.

Q: Is it safe to run a string trimmer near the panels?

Yes, with care — and this is the one thing to truly respect. A trimmer can fling a stone or stick hard enough to chip the glass, so slow down near the panels, keep the head low, and hand-trim the closest spots.

Q: Do I need to do anything in winter?

Hardly a thing — growth is asleep. Your winter attention is really about snow, which our snow-and-winter guide covers. Come spring, you pick the light routine back up.

★ Still have a question about the green side?

There's no such thing as a silly question, and I'm always glad to talk through what to plant, lay down, or leave be around your array. Call or text me at (330) 200-8042 and we'll sort it out.

You don't have to do this alone

You just have to remember that a friendly, patient person is one call away.

I hope this guide made keeping growth in check under your array feel a little less daunting and a lot more doable. Keep it in a drawer with your other home papers, come back to a page whenever you need it, and don't worry about memorizing anything.

When you'd rather have a hand, that's exactly what I do. I come to your home, work at your pace, and never make you feel rushed or silly for asking. A first visit is a flat \$99, and for the parts that don't need me on-site I can often help right on your screen for \$49. Every visit comes with a 30-day, come-back-free guarantee. I don't sell solar and I don't do the licensed electrical work or the install itself — I help you understand it all, ask the right questions, and line up a trustworthy local solar installer, so you never feel talked into anything.

★ Bill's Home Tech — real help, close to home

Call or text me at (330) 200-8042, or visit BillsHomeTech.com. Serving Atwater and all of Portage County. 30+ years of patient, plain-English tech help — and if you're ever not 100% happy with a visit, I'll make it right or refund it. That's a promise. — Bill

Ground-Cover Options

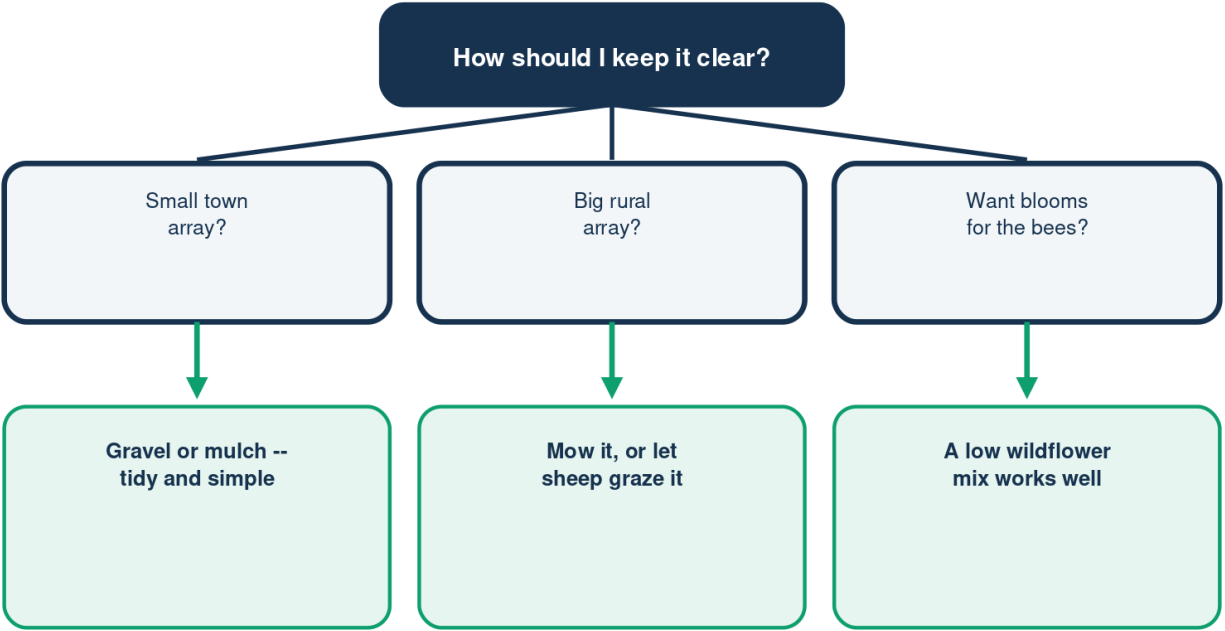
A few good ways to keep growth from shading the panels

	Upkeep	Good for
Gravel/stone	Very low	Tidy town lots
Mulch	Top up now/then	Beds, borders
Low ground cover	Occasional trim	A green look
Wildflower mix	A cut or two	Bigger arrays
Grazing sheep	The flock mows	Rural acreage

No wrong pick -- choose what suits your yard and your Saturdays.

Keeping Growth Down

The easiest path depends on your array and your yard



Never let a string trimmer fling debris into the panel glass.

Illustration - a schematic, not to scale. Your setup may differ.

Let It Grow vs Keep It Managed

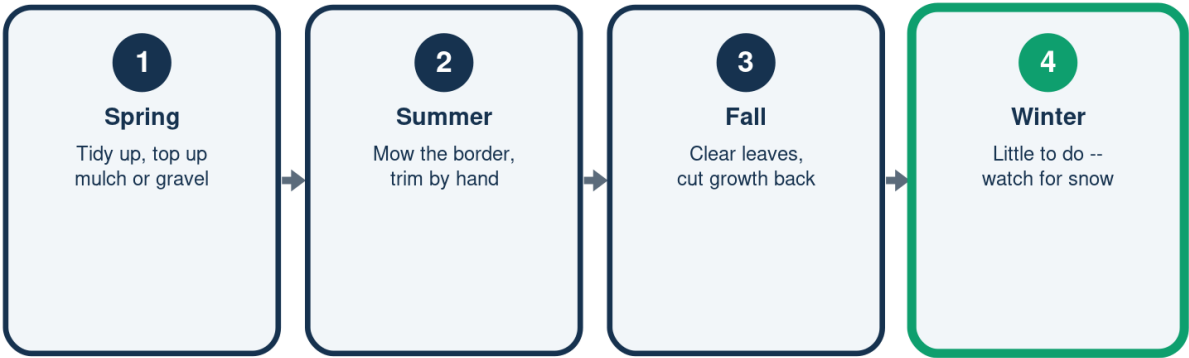
What a little upkeep buys you

	Let it grow	Keep it managed
Low edge	Gets shaded	Stays clear
The glass	Risk of nicks	Protected
Critters	More cover	Fewer hideouts
The look	Overgrown	Cared-for

A little management keeps the array clear, clean, and tidy.

Season by Season

A light rhythm that follows the year



None of it is heavy work -- just a few easy minutes in season.



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A Note From Bill

A quick note from Bill.

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— *Bill*



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