BILL'S HOME TECH

Home & Small Business Tech Solutions

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Questions to Ask Every Solar Installer Before You Sign

The right questions — and how an installer answers them — protect you better than any expertise

Plain-English solar help from:

Bill's Home Tech

Portage County, Ohio

Tech Made Simple. Service Made Personal.

Bill Davis — Bill's Home Tech

(330) 200-8042 · bill@billshometech.com · Atwater, Ohio

Book a visit · billshometech.com/book

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SUMMARY

The 60-Second Version

The best protection when buying solar is asking the right questions and insisting on written answers — and watching how the installer responds. Ask about the company (years in business, licensing, own crews or subcontractors, who you call in ten years), the equipment (exact panel and inverter make, model, and wattage), the price (total, cash versus financed price to expose dealer fees, and price per watt), the savings math (what rate increases and export rates it assumes), and the warranties — especially the workmanship warranty, which depends on the company still existing.

Get the permit-to-PTO process and timeline in writing, know whether it is a purchase, loan, lease, or PPA, and always take the contract home to read. Watch for red-flag answers like "today only," "don't worry about that," or a 30 percent credit a 2026 buyer can't claim. Bill has no stake in which installer you pick and will read the answers with you.

1 The Short Version

The best protection when buying solar is not becoming an expert — it is asking the right questions and insisting on clear, written answers. A good installer welcomes hard questions; a bad one dodges, rushes, or charms past them. This guide gives you the questions to ask every installer before you sign, grouped so you can work through them calmly at your own pace.

You do not need to understand every technical detail behind the answers. Often, how an installer responds — straight and specific, or vague and pushy — tells you as much as the answer itself. Bill does not sell solar and has no stake in which company you choose; these are simply the questions he would ask on your behalf.

- Ask about the company, the equipment, the price, the warranties, and the process.
- Insist on written answers — a verbal promise is worth little later.
- Watch how they respond: straight and specific is good; vague or pushy is a warning.

- Never sign on the first visit, no matter how good the answers sound.

> **TIP**
> Print this guide and bring it to every sales visit. A homeowner working calmly down a written list of questions is in control of the conversation — and far harder to rush or confuse than one hearing it all for the first time.

2 How to Use These Questions

You do not have to fire off every question like an interrogation. Work through them conversationally, take notes on the answers, and pay attention not just to what is said but to how. The goal is a clear, written picture of the deal and an honest read on the company behind it.

1. Ask for the answers in writing, or write them down yourself as you go.
2. Notice whether the installer answers directly or deflects.
3. Ask the same key questions of every company so you can compare fairly.
4. Take the answers home and compare them calmly before deciding anything.

> **WATCH OUT**
> Be wary of any answer that boils down to "don't worry about that" or "just trust me." On a purchase this size, every reasonable question deserves a real answer. An installer who brushes off your questions is showing you how they will treat you after the sale.

3 Questions About the Company

Start with the company itself, because a long equipment warranty is worthless if the company that would honor it is gone. You want an established, properly licensed, well-reviewed installer with a real local track record — not a sales outfit that signs you up and vanishes.

- "How long have you been in business under this name, here in this area?"

- "Are you licensed and insured for electrical and roofing work in Ohio?"
- "Will your own employees install this, or do you use subcontractors?"
- "Can you give me references from local customers, and where can I read reviews?"
- "If I have a problem in five or ten years, who do I call, and will you still be here?"

> **GOOD TO KNOW**
>
> A company that has been around for years, uses its own crews, and has a solid local reputation is worth a lot on a product meant to last decades. Staying power is not a detail — for a 25-year system, it may be the single most important thing about an installer.

4 Questions About the Equipment

Next, pin down exactly what equipment you are getting. Vague promises of "premium panels" are a warning sign; a good installer names specific, real products and can explain why they chose them for your roof.

- "What is the exact make, model, and wattage of the panels, and the inverter?"
- "Are these a single string inverter or microinverters, and why is that right for my roof?"
- "How will the system handle any shade on my roof?"
- "Is monitoring included, so I can see what the system is producing?"
- "Is a battery included or separate — and if separate, what would it add?"

> **TIP**
>
> Write down the exact equipment names each installer quotes. Specific makes and models let you compare fairly and look up the warranties yourself; a company that will only say "high-quality panels" is hiding the ball.

5 Questions About the Price

Now the money. The aim is a clear, itemized, apples-to-apples price you can compare across installers — not a single lump sum or, worse, only a monthly payment. Remember that for a 2026 purchase there is no 30 percent federal credit to factor in, so be alert to any quote that still assumes it.

- "What is the total price, itemized, before and after any incentives?"
- "What is the cash price versus the financed price?" (this exposes hidden dealer fees)
- "What is the price per watt?" (total price divided by the system's watts)
- "Does this quote assume any tax credit, and am I actually eligible as a 2026 buyer?"
- "What exactly is included — permits, any panel upgrade, monitoring — and what is extra?"

WATCH OUT

If an installer leads with a monthly payment and resists giving you the total price and the price per watt, slow down. Those two numbers are how you compare quotes honestly, and a reluctance to share them is itself an answer.

6 Questions About Production and Savings

Any quote will come with estimates of how much power the system makes and how much you will save. These numbers drive the whole payback case, so it is fair to probe how honest and specific they are to your actual roof and Ohio's rules.

- "How did you estimate my yearly production, and does it account for my roof's shade and direction?"
- "Was this modeled for Northeast Ohio weather specifically?"
- "What export rate did you assume, given Ohio's net billing?"
- "What electric-rate increases does your savings estimate assume?"
- "Can you show me the payback math with and without any assumed rate increases?"

WATCH OUT

Savings estimates can be quietly inflated by assuming steep yearly electric-rate increases or generous export credits Ohio does not offer. Ask what assumptions are baked in, and ask to see the math with conservative ones too. Honest numbers survive that request.

Rather not do this yourself? I'll come to your home and set it up for you — a flat $99 first visit across Portage County, Ohio and nearby communities. Outside the area? I also help remotely by phone or screen-share. Book at billshometech.com/book or call (330) 200-8042.

7 Questions About the Warranty

Warranties are where reassuring words hide important differences, so get specific about all three kinds: the panels, the inverter, and — most importantly — the installer's own workmanship. The workmanship warranty is the installer's promise to fix their own installation and any roof leak they cause.

- "How long is the panel product warranty, and the production warranty?"
- "How long is the inverter warranty?"
- "How long is your workmanship warranty, and exactly what does it cover?"
- "If a panel leaks or fails, who removes and reinstalls it, and who pays?"
- "What happens to these warranties if your company goes out of business?"

WATCH OUT

The workmanship warranty is the one that depends on the company still being around to honor it, which is why I weigh it alongside the company's track record. A strong workmanship warranty from a shaky company is a weak promise. I am glad to help you judge that balance.

8 Questions About the Process and Timeline

You will also want to understand how the project unfolds after you sign — the permits, inspection, and utility approval that stand between installation and actually switching on. A good installer handles these and can describe them clearly.

- "Do you handle all the permits, the inspection, and the utility interconnection application?"
- "What is your realistic timeline from signing to permission to operate for my area?"
- "What do you need from me, and what will I need to sign or be present for?"
- "Will you give me copies of the permit, the passed inspection, and the permission to operate?"

> **GOOD TO KNOW**
>
> An installer who can walk you through the permit-to-PTO process confidently has clearly done it many times, which is reassuring. One who is vague about it, or who hints you will handle the paperwork, is a different story. Our permits-and-interconnection guide covers these stages in full.

9 Questions About Financing and Contracts

If financing or a lease is involved, the contract terms deserve their own careful set of questions, because this is where the most expensive surprises live. Separate the system's price from the financing and judge each on its own.

- "Is this a purchase, a loan, a lease, or a PPA?" (be sure you know which)
- "If it's a loan: what is the interest rate, the term, and any dealer fee?"
- "If it's a lease or PPA: is there a yearly escalator, and what's the total over the full term?"
- "What happens to this contract if I sell my home?"
- "Can I take the full contract home to read before signing anything?"

WATCH OUT

Never sign, initial, or tap "agree" on a contract you have not taken home and read in full. "Can I take this home to review?" is a reasonable request, and a company that resists it is telling you something important. See our guide on the four ways to pay for solar.

10 Questions About Service After the Install

Solar is a decades-long relationship, not a one-day purchase, so it is worth asking how the company treats you after the crew drives away. Good installers stand behind their work and make service easy; weaker ones go quiet once the sale is done.

- "If my production drops or the system faults, how do I reach you, and how fast do you respond?"
- "Does the monitoring alert you to problems, or is it on me to notice?"
- "Is there any ongoing cost for monitoring or service?"
- "If a part fails under warranty, do you handle the whole repair, including labor and any roof work?"
- "What routine upkeep, if any, does the system need from me?"

GOOD TO KNOW

Everyday solar needs very little upkeep — an occasional check that panels are clear of heavy debris or snow, and an eye on the monitoring app. The real service question is who fixes it if something goes wrong years from now, which loops back to choosing a company with staying power.

11 Red-Flag Answers to Watch For

Beyond the questions themselves, certain answers and behaviors are warning signs regardless of the words. If you hear these, slow down and get an independent opinion before going further.

- "This price is only good today" — a manufactured deadline, almost never real.
- "Don't worry about that" in place of a real answer to a fair question.
- "You've been pre-approved / selected" — a sales script, not a real program.
- Reluctance to give you the total price, the price per watt, or the contract to take home.
- A promised 30 percent tax credit for a 2026 purchase that no longer exists for buyers.

> **TIP**
> Any single red flag is a reason to pause, not necessarily to run — but it earns a second opinion. You lose nothing by taking the written quote home, comparing it, and having a trusted person or Bill look it over before you decide.

12 Your Final Pre-Signing Checklist

Once you have asked your questions and gathered the answers, run this short checklist before you sign anything. If you cannot comfortably check every box, that is your signal to pause, ask more, or get a second opinion — not to sign.

1. I have the total price and the price per watt in writing, and compared them across installers.
2. I know exactly which equipment I am getting, by make and model.
3. I understand the production and savings assumptions, and saw the conservative version of the math.
4. I know all three warranty lengths, especially the workmanship warranty, and judged the company's staying power.
5. I know whether this is a purchase, loan, lease, or PPA, and the full-term cost.
6. No quote assumes a tax credit I cannot claim as a 2026 buyer.
7. I have taken the contract home, read it in full, and am under no pressure to sign today.

Every box checked means you are deciding with clear eyes. Any box you cannot check is simply a question still to answer, and there is never harm in taking the time to answer it. A sound solar deal will still be there next week.

TIP

If a salesperson grows impatient while you work through this checklist, that impatience is itself useful information. A company confident in its offer is happy to wait while you make sure. Pressure at this stage is a reason to step back, not to hurry.

Rather not do this yourself? I'll come to your home and set it up for you — a flat $99 first visit across Portage County, Ohio and nearby communities. Outside the area? I also help remotely by phone or screen-share. Book at billshometech.com/book or call (330) 200-8042.

13 Verifying Licensing, Insurance, and Certification

Anyone can print a nice brochure. The questions that actually protect you are the ones you can check for yourself. Here is how to confirm the three things that matter most before you let a crew on your roof.

1. Ask for their license and insurance in writing — including liability and workers' compensation. A real company hands this over without flinching.
2. Ask whether their installers hold NABCEP certification — the main independent credential for solar professionals — and who on your specific job holds it.
3. Ask for three local references from the past year, and actually call one or two. Ask those customers whether the work finished on time and whether service calls get answered.
4. Search the company's name along with words like 'reviews' and 'complaints,' and check whether the business has been around under the same name for more than a year or two.
5. Get every answer that matters into the written proposal, not just said out loud.

- License and insurance: protects you if someone is hurt or something is damaged.
- NABCEP certification: a sign of trained, tested installers.
- Local references: the single best predictor of how they will treat you.

GOOD TO KNOW

Workers' compensation insurance matters more than people realize. If an uninsured worker is injured on your roof, you can end up exposed. A one-minute question now can save a great deal later.

14 Reading the Production Estimate

Every quote promises how much power the system will make in a year, usually in kilowatt-hours. That number drives all the savings math, so it is worth knowing how to sanity-check it instead of taking it on faith.

- Ask what the estimate is based on. A credible one uses an industry model (you will hear names like 'PVWatts') fed with your real roof, direction, and measured shade — not a rosy round number.
- Ask whether the estimate accounts for your actual shade. An estimate that ignores your trees will always look too good.
- Compare the yearly figure against your current electric usage, printed on your bill. A system sized far beyond your use deserves a question.
- Ask what happens if production falls short — is there any written guarantee, and what does it actually pay if the system underperforms?

In the estimate	A good answer sounds like	A weak answer sounds like
What's it based on?	'An industry model using your roof and our shade measurement'	'Our experience' or a vague round number
Does it include shade?	'Yes, here's your shade reading'	'Shade won't matter'
What if it underperforms?	'Here's our written production guarantee'	'It won't' or silence

WATCH OUT

Be wary of an estimate that is far sunnier than your neighbors' real results or that assumes you will use far more electricity than your bills show. Over-promised production is how a 'great deal' quietly becomes a disappointment.

15 Who Actually Does the Work?

The friendly person who knocks on your door is often a salesperson, not the crew who will be on your roof. Many solar companies hire subcontractors. That is not automatically bad, but you deserve to know who stands behind the work and the warranty.

1. Ask plainly: 'Will your own employees do the install, or subcontractors?'
2. If subcontractors, ask who warranties the work — the company you signed with, or the crew that came out.
3. Ask who to call for service in a year, and whether that number still reaches a real person at the same company.
4. Ask how long the company itself has been operating — not the industry, the company.

GOOD TO KNOW

A company that uses subcontractors can still be excellent — what matters is that the company you sign with, not a crew you will never see again, clearly owns the warranty and the service calls.

16 Comparing Written Quotes Apples-to-Apples

The hardest part of shopping for solar is that no two quotes look alike. One hides the inverter brand, another buries the price in a monthly payment, a third quotes a bigger system. The fix is to force every quote onto the same simple grid before you compare.

Line to fill in for each quote	Why it matters
Total cash price	The real number to compare; ignore the monthly payment for now
System size (kW)	Lets you compute dollars per watt
Dollars per watt	Cash price divided by watts — the great equalizer between quotes
Panel brand and warranty	Not all panels or warranties are equal
Inverter type and warranty	String, optimizers, or microinverters — and how long it's covered
Production estimate (kWh/year)	How much power they promise, and on what basis
Who does the work	Employees or subcontractors; who owns the warranty

Fill one row per quote and the differences jump off the page. A quote that will not give you a clean cash price and system size, so you can work out dollars per watt, has told you something important about how they do business.

> **TIP**
> Dollars per watt is your single best comparison tool. Take the total cash price and divide by the system's watts (an 8 kW system is 8,000 watts). It turns three confusing quotes into three plain numbers you can line up side by side.

17 A One-Page Scorecard for Three Installers

Bring this to the table. Score each installer as you go, and let the filled-in page — not the smoothest talker — guide your choice. Give each a simple check, question mark, or cross.

Question	Installer A	Installer B	Installer C
Licensed and insured, in writing?			
NABCEP-certified installers?			
Gave local references you called?			
Clear total cash price?			
Dollars per watt in a fair range?			
Production estimate based on your roof and shade?			
Written production guarantee?			
Clear who owns the warranty and service?			
No pressure to sign today?			

WATCH OUT

If you would rather not do this alone, I am glad to sit at the kitchen table with you and your quotes and help you fill this in. I don't sell solar, so I have no reason to steer you anywhere — only to help you read what is in front of you.

18 When to Call Bill

Asking good questions is your strongest protection, but hearing the answers to a huge, unfamiliar purchase can still be overwhelming, and salespeople are practiced at sounding convincing. You do not have to judge it all alone. Bill has no stake in which installer you pick, so his read on the answers is purely in your interest.

- You have an installer's answers and want help telling the solid ones from the slick ones.
- You are being rushed or getting "don't worry about that" instead of real answers.
- You want help comparing two or three companies' answers side by side.
- A quote assumes a tax credit, big rate increases, or export credits that do not fit Ohio.
- You simply want someone in your corner before you sign.

Call Bill at (330) 200-8042. He will go through the installers' answers with you, flag the evasions and the overpromises, and help you choose a company you can trust for a system meant to last decades.

CHEAT SHEET

Everyday Cheat Sheet

Print this and bring it to every sales visit. How they answer tells you as much as the answer.

I want to...	Do this...
Vet the company	Ask years in business, licensing, own crews vs subs, and who to call in 10 years
Pin down equipment	Get exact panel and inverter make, model, and wattage — not "premium panels"
Compare price fairly	Ask total price, cash vs financed price, and price per watt
Test the savings math	Ask the assumptions — rate increases, export rate — and see conservative numbers
Judge the warranty	Ask the workmanship warranty length and what happens if they go out of business
Protect yourself	Take the contract home to read; never sign on the first visit
Get help	Call Bill: (330) 200-8042

BEFORE YOU GO

A Note From Bill

A quick note from Bill. I write these guides to make home tech a little less frustrating, and I do my best to keep every step accurate and up to date. Still, every home, device, and setup is a bit different, so I can't promise a guide will match yours exactly or fix your particular problem. These guides are for general information only — they're not professional, legal, or financial advice, and they don't replace your device's own manual or the manufacturer's instructions. Please go slow, use your own good judgment, and use everything here at your own risk. If a step involves electrical wiring, a gas appliance, a water heater, plumbing, or climbing a ladder — or if anything just doesn't feel safe — please stop and call a licensed professional (or give me a call at 330-200-8042). Bill's Home Tech and Bill Davis can't be responsible for any damage, data loss, or injury that results.

HOW I CAN HELP

Your Visit — and My Promise

You don't have to remember all of it — just that a friendly, patient person is one call away, whenever you'd rather have a hand.

KEY SPECS

In your home — $99 flat for the first visit, no contracts and no surprises, with a 30-day come-back-free follow-up. In-home visits cover Portage County, Ohio and nearby communities.
Outside the area? Remotely — $49 for a screen-share session (free for Support Plan members, $39/mo), refundable if I can't fix it — and credited toward a visit if you'd rather have me in person. Book either at billshometech.com/book.

GOOD TO KNOW

My promise — If you're not 100% satisfied with your visit, I'll come back at no charge, or refund the full $99. No questions, no awkwardness. That's how I'd want to be treated.

Whenever you're ready, I'll come to your home anywhere in Portage County, Ohio and nearby communities, at your pace. Too far for a house call? I also help remotely. Book at billshometech.com/book or call (330) 200-8042. — Bill

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