Savvy consumers are turning to solar energy to beat the escalating price of electricity. Thanks to technological advances and attractive rebates, home solar-electric systems are more popular and affordable than ever. Last year, Americans installed 792 megawatts of residential solar systems, enough to power the equivalent of more than 130,000 homes.

In Southern California, Cheryl and Robert Boland faced electrical bills that averaged $300 a month and spiked to nearly $600 during the dog days of summer. Then the Bolands installed solar panels on the roof of their Apple Valley home. “Now our utility bill averages about $1.75 each month,” said Cheryl.

“When I compare the cost of installing the system with what we will save on our bills over the next two decades, solar gives us an incredible return on investment. For us, it was all about the money.”

For homeowners interested in using solar panels to combat high energy bills, here are four important points to consider:

Reliable solar panels. Because home solar-energy systems should last for at least 25 years, homeowners must know theirs is built to last. Many customers find assurance in purchasing products with proven longevity. “We chose panels from SolarWorld, a long-standing American manufacturer,” she said.

The right installer. Experience and reputation are critical in selecting a solar installer. This solar professional will not only design your system and install the panels, but he or she will guide you through the process of obtaining tax incentives, rebates and financing options, potentially saving you thousands of dollars. To find a qualified installer in your area, visit www.solarworld.com.

Smart system design. A residential solar system must be designed to produce the right amount of power for your home and lifestyle. A good installer will review your previous year’s energy bills along with the orientation and shading of your roof. Check your installer’s credentials for signs of trustworthy certification, for instance, as a manufacturer’s authorized installer.

Guaranteed performance. A factory process called “plus sorting” ensures that solar panels are tested to meet or exceed their nameplate power rating. Without plus sorting, system owners can find their systems producing as a much as 5 percent less energy than advertised. In addition, a 25-to-30-year linear warranty and 10-year workmanship warranty provide consumer protection.

With these four components in place, homeowners often experience a 50 percent decrease in their electric bills, and sometimes eliminate their bills completely.

For more information on a solar solution for your home, visit www.solarworld.com.