

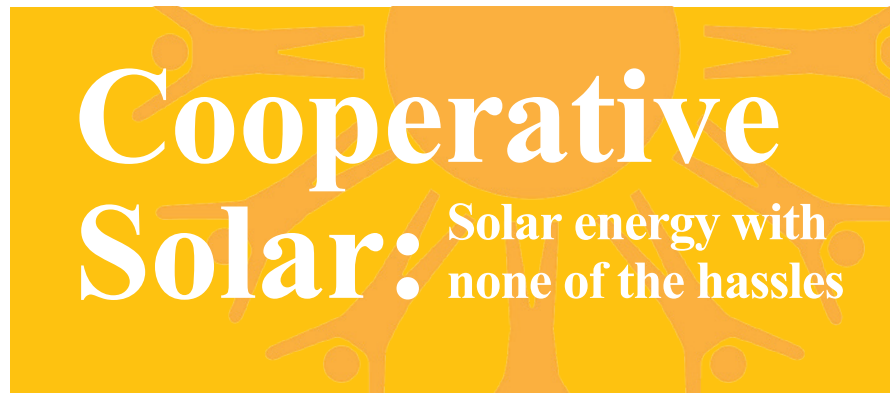
## Cooperative Solar could save you money

**F**or decades, Mark Bolton has been a proponent of solar energy. A Coastal Electric Cooperative vice president and member himself, it has been during his tenure that Coastal Electric developed Coastal Georgia's first community solar farm at its headquarters in Midway.

But even a solar advocate like Bolton yields to the thriving tree canopy that makes our area unique. Thanks to the shade cast by century-old live oaks surrounding his home, Bolton has no viable options to reap the benefits of solar power.

Until he signed up for Cooperative Solar.

Through Coastal Electric's Cooperative Solar program, Bolton's share of solar power (he has two blocks



for a total of \$50) produced by solar farms across Georgia saved him \$39.34 on his November 2021 electric bill and \$43.28 on his October 2021 bill, compared to his monthly bill without the solar subscription. So, his solar

electricity cost about 6 cents per kWh, and his non-solar electricity cost about 10.8 cents per kWh. Solar production varies from month to month based on weather and seasonal changes.

For any Coastal Electric member who wants the advantages of solar power but not the cost or maintenance that comes with installing panels at their home, Cooperative Solar might be a beneficial option.

Electricity delivered through Coastal Electric's Cooperative Solar program is sourced through cooperative-owned renewable energy supplier Green Power EMC. Georgia's electric cooperatives have a combined 972 megawatts of solar capacity from 37 sites throughout the state, including sites in Bryan, Liberty and McIntosh counties. That's enough energy to help power approximately 158,000 electric co-op households.

With the addition of six more sites under construction, by 2024, that capacity is expected to grow to more than 1,500 megawatts.

*Continued on page 24B*



Like many in Coastal Georgia, as it stands, Mark Bolton's home is not a candidate for solar panels due to the shade cast by century-old live oaks.

# Cooperative Solar, *Continued from page 24A*

Coastal Electric members can subscribe to small blocks, or shares, of that massive solar portfolio. A block is equivalent to 2 kilowatts (or about six residential-sized solar panels). Each block costs \$25 and is charged monthly on your electric bill. Each member can sign up to purchase a maximum of two blocks, or \$50, per month. The energy produced is distributed back to the power grid, and your solar credit is subtracted from the metered energy used at your home before your bill is calculated.

*Continued on page 24C*



**Mark Bolton shares solar data with Joey Nunn, a teacher liaison for a solar education program, while standing underneath the 40-kilowatt solar array at Coastal Electric's headquarters in Midway. The array was the first in Coastal Georgia to provide community solar. Pictured behind Nunn and Bolton is Coastal Electric Energy Adviser Jason Smith.**

## Avoid solar pitfalls

BY ENERGY ADVISER JASON SMITH



**Jason Smith**

If Cooperative Solar is not for you and you want to own your own solar array, we want to make it easy. We're happy to be an objective advocate for our members as you navigate the process.

Reach out to Coastal Electric so we can help you make informed decisions when choosing a solar array to meet your needs. We can even recommend local, home-grown companies that have provided reliable service to other members who have chosen to go the route of having panels installed. Because as much as we advocate for solar, unfortunately, some rooftop solar vendors provide misleading information.

Those promising no more power bills, for example.

While your net monthly consumption may decrease by adding a solar array, Coastal Electric must still provide you with energy at night and on cloudy days. Often, even adding a battery storage system is not enough to fully eliminate the need for supplemental power.

"We really want to warn people—don't get caught up in these schemes," says Jason Smith, Coastal Electric Cooperative energy adviser. "If members want to put solar in, we support that, and we want to help them have realistic expectations about what solar is going to do for them."

Over the past few years, Smith and other co-op employees have heard numerous horror stories from members who paid large sums of money for solar arrays that won't perform to the level promised by solar companies—and don't deliver the payback, as a result.

It's become such a prevalent problem as of late, Coastal Electric invested in the same software rooftop solar vendors use to design solar arrays so co-op members can see, when the accurate data is plugged in, what they can realistically expect from a solar array.

"If it sounds too good to be true, it probably is," Smith says. "I don't want people to have buyer's remorse. I'd love for them to come

to us first before making a financial commitment they might regret."

Some solar companies have also become notorious for long service wait times. Smith says a customer with a wiring issue could be stuck for a full month before the installer can come to their home and correct the problem.

Where to start? Give us a call at (800) 421-2343. We'll be happy to walk you through the process of exploring your options for solar energy at your home. You'll need to sign an Interconnect Agreement with Coastal Electric before connecting a solar system to the electric grid, and you can find it on [www.CoastalElectric.Coop](http://www.CoastalElectric.Coop).

For more general information, such as choosing the size solar system to fit your needs and helpful questions for contractors, scan the QR code found on this page.

Continued from page 24B

Cooperative Solar requires no contracts, and a member can drop their subscription at any time.

Thanks to economies of scale, Cooperative Solar:

- Costs members significantly less than installing a solar system—\$25 a month for Cooperative Solar versus \$20,000 to \$65,000 for the installation of a home solar array.
- Saves a member money on their electric bills.
- Eliminates the need for holes in a homeowner's roof.
- Allows renters to take advantage of solar energy.
- Violates no homeowners association (HOA) rules.
- Avoids the headaches of maintenance or repairs.
- Is obligation-free. The panels that produce

Cooperative Solar do so in the most ideal conditions—in an open field, not limited by shade or roof orientation, and the more recent installations feature panels that move to track the sun's rays, increasing their solar energy production.

As Coastal Electric's portfolio of solar has grown, so has the amount of solar produced—not only because the number of panels has increased, but also because these expansive solar farms are dispersed across Georgia. This location diversity allows us to capture sunlight even if it's cloudy in one area, because chances are, the sun is shining on panels in another part of the state.

As a result, members who participate in Cooperative Solar are saving money on their electric bills.

In January, even with less daylight due to shorter days and cloudy weather, a 2-kilowatt block of Cooperative Solar produced 332 kWh of electricity. That's about 8 cents per kWh, shaving \$11 off members' electricity bills per block of Cooperative Solar.

In other words, residential electricity at Coastal Electric's regular rate costs about 10.8 cents per kWh. Electricity produced through Cooperative Solar averages around 6-8 cents per kWh.

As Coastal Electric continues to add solar to its portfolio, the value of Cooperative Solar will continue to benefit participating residential members like Bolton and others who subscribe.

For more information about Cooperative Solar for your home, scan the QR code, visit [www.CoastalElectric.Coop](http://www.CoastalElectric.Coop) or call (800) 421-2343.



## Plant trees safely

Before you dig, call 811 to locate buried utility lines.

### LOW TREE ZONE

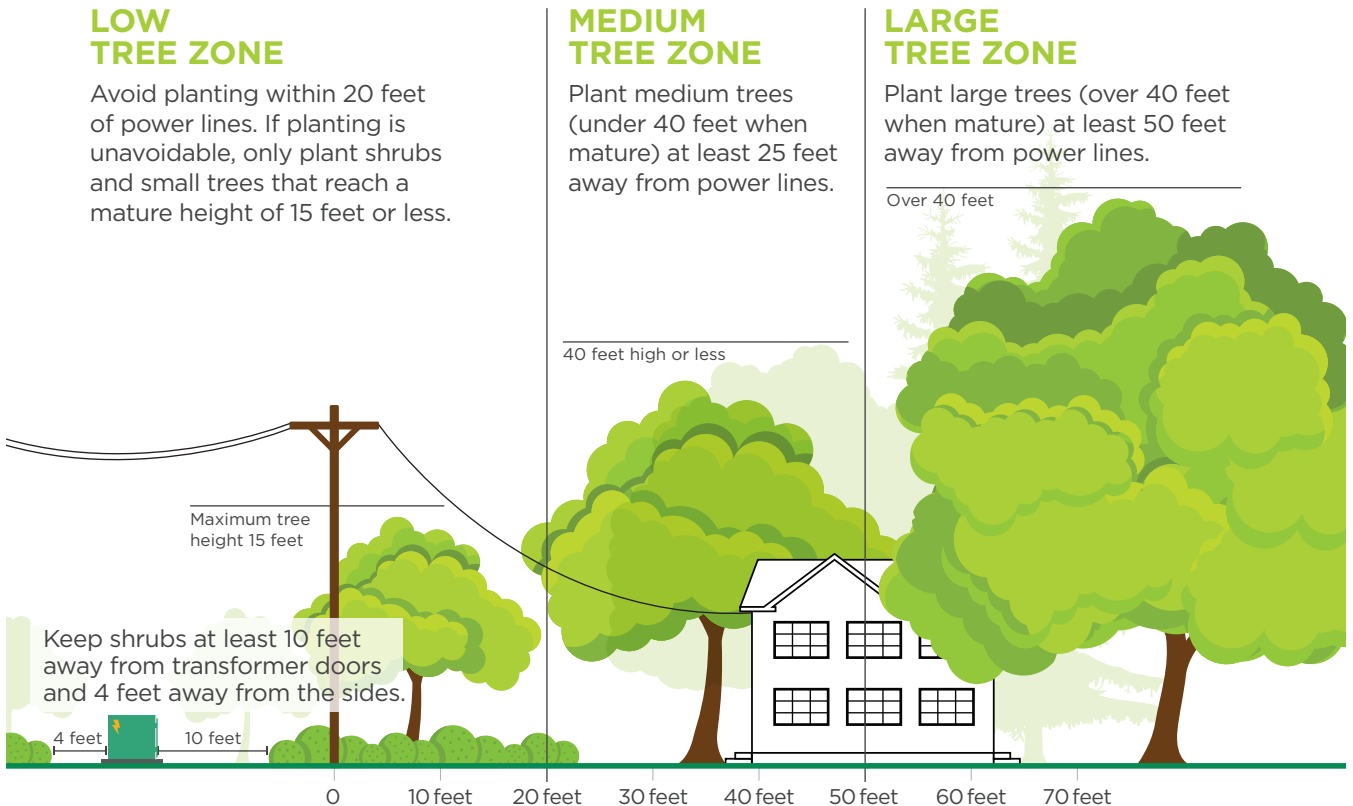
Avoid planting within 20 feet of power lines. If planting is unavoidable, only plant shrubs and small trees that reach a mature height of 15 feet or less.

### MEDIUM TREE ZONE

Plant medium trees (under 40 feet when mature) at least 25 feet away from power lines.

### LARGE TREE ZONE

Plant large trees (over 40 feet when mature) at least 50 feet away from power lines.



# CONNECTIONS

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## Business office hours

Open 8 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. Monday through Thursday, and until 5 p.m. on Friday, except for holidays.

## Report outages

Call us at (800) 421-2343

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*Coastal Electric Cooperative, your Touchstone Energy Partner, is a not-for-profit, member-owned power cooperative providing electricity to the people of Bryan, Liberty, Long and McIntosh counties.*



Touchstone Energy®  
Cooperatives

*The power of human connections*

## Furthering your education is expensive.

### \$20,000 in scholarship money can help!

If you are a high school senior in south Bryan, Liberty, Long or McIntosh counties, you could earn a \$5,000 scholarship—renewable for up to four years—from the Coastal Electric Cooperative Foundation. Get your application at [www.CoastalElectric.Coop/scholarships](http://www.CoastalElectric.Coop/scholarships). This year's deadline is **April 1**.

