

Living Off The Grid Imagine heating your home without relying on the local power plant. Wouldn't feel good to meet your need for electricity without harming the environment? For a growing number of people, these ideas have become reality. Out of concern for the environment and a desire for self-reliance, these people have made the bold decision to live off the grid. What exactly is the grid? The grid, short for the power grid, is the linked system that supplies electricity to most homes and buildings in developed nations. Homes that are off the grid are not hooked up to the local power supply. Instead, they produce all of the energy they consume. As a result, people living off the grid avoid the environmental and financial costs that come with on-grid living. The key to getting off the grid is replacing electricity supplied by a power plant with a renewable energy source, like wind or solar power. Buildings that use solar power have solar panels on the roof or near the building. When the sun's hits the panels, the panels collect the energy. Wind power is collected by turbines, also known as windmills. When the wind blows the blades move, producing energy which is turned into electricity by a generator. Some people go even further off the grid. In addition to setting up a renewable energy source, they also have an independent source of water. They dig wells to access ground water or use a cistern, a type of tank, to collect rainwater. Those most committed to living off the grid may even lack garbage service. These people generally live a life that creates very little waste, growing their own organic fruits and vegetables, and raising chickens and goats for eggs and milk. By avoiding the consumption of packaged foods, they greatly reduce paper and plastic waste. As challenging as it may be to live off the grid, most off-gridders feel that the benefits far outweigh the difficulties. Jorge and Ella Alvarez, off-gridders in Northern Arizona say "We love being off grid. It's definitely hard work, but it puts everything in life into perspective. It's surprising to find just now much you can do without. Many people think we have a harsh and depressing lifestyle. Nothing could be further from the truth. We see living off the grid as a gift that has allowed us to be more in touch with each other." 88 is shared by Wendy Johnston, mother of three living off the grid with her family in Ontario. Wendy recalls, "In the house I grew up in, we would leave lights on all day, the thermostat and water running without a second thought. I wanted my children to be raised with more respect for the environment and an awareness of the impact that they have on it. My children don't take for granted. I love the fact that they are learning how to take care of the earth while, at the same time, learning to be self-sufficient." Wendy admits that living off the grid has its difficulties. For example, the Johnstons' power usually goes down a few times a year. However, Wendy reflects, "The funny thing is that these often turn out to be some of our best times as a family. The power outages have an unexpected way of bringing us closer together. We read books and play games by candlelight, or we get together and tell stories." Living off the grid entails sacrifices, and is certainly not for everyone. But for the thousands of people who have made this bold choice, life off the grid is filled with rewards that can't be matched by the conveniences and luxuries of on-grid living.