

Map of mean daily sums of radiation for Europe (April 2001)

<http://www.eere.energy.gov>

Solar Energy Resources

Solar radiation, often called the solar resource, is a general term for the electromagnetic radiation emitted by the sun. Solar radiation can be captured and turned into useful forms of energy, such as heat and electricity, using a variety of technologies. However, the technical feasibility and economical operation of these technologies at a specific location depends on the available solar resource.

Basic Principles

Every location on Earth receives sunlight at least part of the year. The amount of solar radiation that reaches any one spot on the Earth's surface varies according to:

- Geographic location
- Time of day
- Season
- Local landscape
- Local weather.

Because the Earth is round, the sun strikes the surface at different angles, ranging from 0° (just above the horizon) to 90° (directly overhead). When the sun's rays are vertical, the Earth's surface gets all the energy possible. The more slanted the sun's rays are, the longer they travel through the atmosphere, becoming more scattered and diffuse. Because the Earth is round, the frigid polar regions never get a high sun, and because of the tilted axis of rotation, these areas receive no sun at all during part of the year.

The Earth revolves around the sun in an elliptical orbit and is closer to the sun during part of the year. When the sun is nearer the Earth, the Earth's surface receives a little more solar energy. The Earth is nearer the sun when it is summer in the southern hemisphere and winter in the northern hemisphere. However, the presence of vast oceans moderates the hotter summers and colder winters one would expect to see in the southern hemisphere as a result of this difference.

The 23.5° tilt in the Earth's axis of rotation is a more significant factor in determining the amount of sunlight striking the Earth at a particular location. Tilting results in longer days in the northern hemisphere from the spring (vernal) equinox to the fall (autumnal) equinox and longer days in the southern hemisphere during the other 6 months. Days and nights are both exactly 12 hours long on the equinoxes, which occur each year on or around March 23 and September 22.

Countries such as the United States, which lie in the middle latitudes, receive more solar energy in the summer not only because days are longer, but also because the sun is nearly overhead. The sun's rays are far more slanted during the shorter days of the winter months. Cities such as Denver, Colorado, (near 40° latitude) receive nearly three times more solar energy in June than they do in December.

The rotation of the Earth is also responsible for hourly variations in sunlight. In the early morning and late afternoon, the sun is low in the sky. Its rays travel further through the atmosphere than at noon, when the sun is at its highest point. On a clear day, the greatest amount of solar energy reaches a solar collector around solar noon.

Diffuse and Direct Solar Radiation

As sunlight passes through the atmosphere, some of it is absorbed, scattered, and reflected by:

- Air molecules
- Water vapor
- Clouds
- Dust
- Pollutants
- Forest fires
- Volcanoes.

This is called *diffuse solar radiation*. The solar radiation that reaches the Earth's surface without being diffused is called *direct beam solar radiation*. The sum of the diffuse and direct solar radiation is called *global solar radiation*. Atmospheric conditions can reduce direct beam radiation by 10% on clear, dry days and by 100% during thick, cloudy days.

Measurement

Scientists measure the amount of sunlight falling on specific locations at different times of the year. They then estimate the amount of sunlight falling on regions at the same latitude with similar climates. Measurements of solar energy are typically expressed as total radiation on a horizontal surface, or as total radiation on a surface tracking the sun.

Radiation data for [solar electric \(photovoltaic\) systems](#) are often represented as kilowatt-hours per square meter (kWh/m^2). Direct estimates of solar energy may also be expressed as watts per square meter (W/m^2).

Radiation data for solar [water heating](#) and [space heating](#) systems are usually represented in British thermal units per square foot (Btu/ft^2).

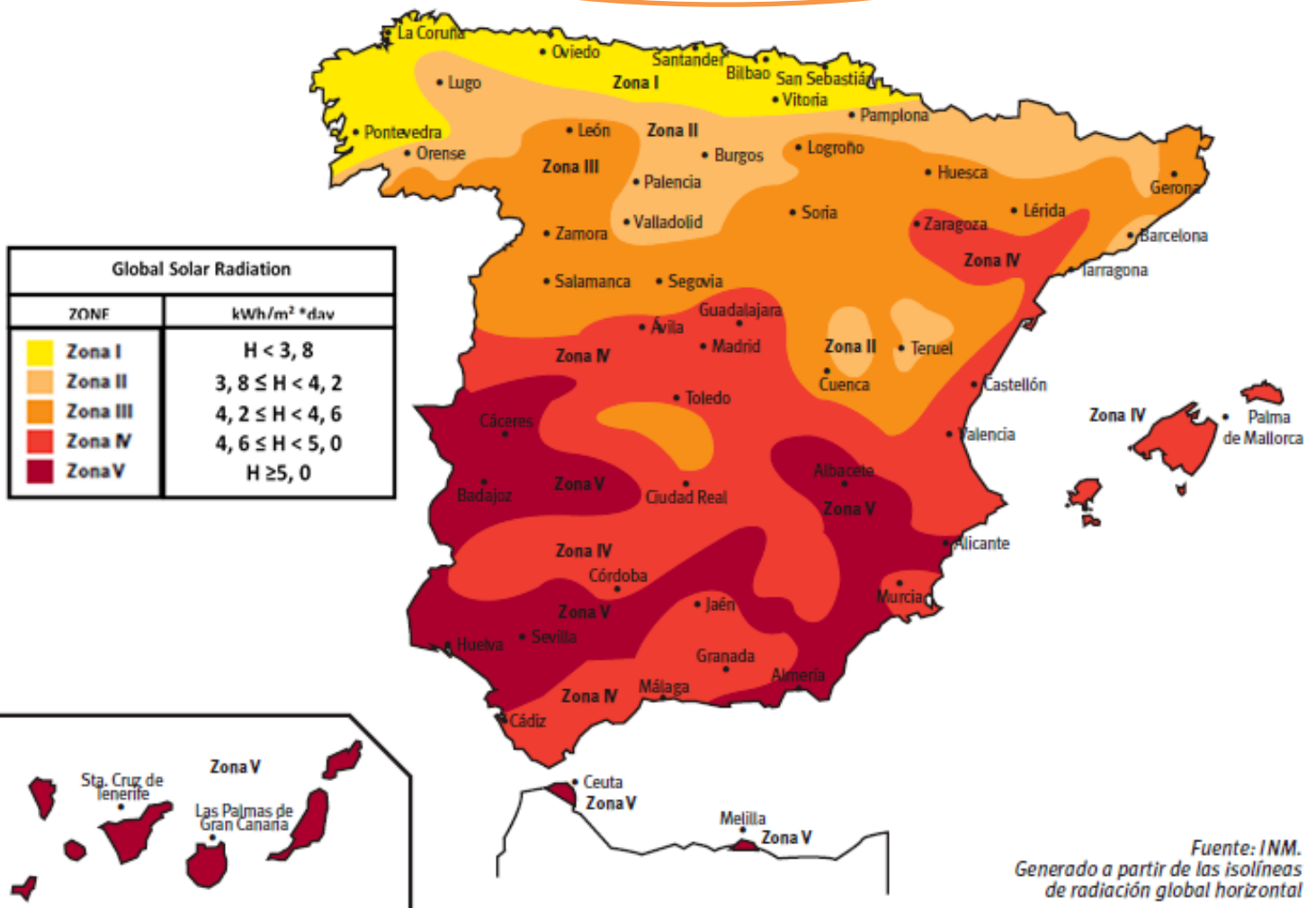
Distribution

The solar resource across the United States is ample for photovoltaic (PV) systems because they use both direct and scattered sunlight. Other technologies may be more limited. However, the amount of power generated by any solar technology at a particular site depends on how much of the sun's energy reaches it. Thus, solar technologies function most efficiently in the southwestern United States, which receives the greatest amount of solar energy.

Solar Energy Resource Maps

[View solar resource maps](#) for both PV and concentrating solar power.

SPAIN SOLAR RADIATION MAP



THE PROBLEM:

We have 6 panels that have a useful output of 125 W. Determine for the city of Alicante, with the help of the solar radiation map:

- The average HSP solar peak hour
- The average radiation received expressed in MJ/ m²
- The energy provided by 6 panels in one day and the optimum angle to place them