



# Consumer Guide to Cool Roofs

Cool roofs can save energy as well as beautify your home.

## THE EMERGENCE OF COOL ROOFS

Cool roofing is not a new concept. In the mid-1980s, researchers at DOE national laboratories in Tennessee and California were measuring the energy-saving benefits of what were called “solar radiation control coatings” on test roofs. Since then, great strides in new technologies have made cool roofs much more effective.



- Solar reflective roofs, solar reflective pavements, and vegetation could lower urban air temperatures, saving additional energy and improving air quality.
- Cool roofing reduces peak demand for electricity, helping to lower costs and avoid power outages.
- Cool roof products dominate the commercial roofing marketplace in warm and hot climates.
- Cool products are generally economical on low-slope roofs for commercial or industrial buildings.
- Cool options are available for most traditional roofing materials.
- White roofs are coolest, but cool colors are a popular alternative for roofs that can be seen by neighbors.
- ENERGY STAR® lists about 3,000 approved cool-roofing materials.



Cool roofs help lower indoor air temperatures by reflecting sunlight and decreasing heat absorption.

## Benefits of Cool Roofs

The immediate and long-term benefits of roofs that stay cool in the sun have made cool roofing one of the fastest-growing sectors of the building industry. Studies exploring the energy efficiency, cost-effectiveness, and sustainability of cool roofs show that in warm or hot climates, substituting a cool roof for a conventional roof can:

- Reduce the annual air conditioning energy use of a single-story building by up to 15%.
- Cool interior spaces in buildings that do not have air conditioning, making occupants more comfortable.
- Reduce carbon emissions by lowering the need for fossil fuel-generated electricity to run air conditioners.
- Potentially help slow climate change by cooling the atmosphere.

If you are installing a new roof or remodeling an existing building, there are a range of cool roof options to fit your needs and save money.



## How Cool Roofs Work

Traditional dark-colored roofing materials absorb sunlight, making them warm in the sun and transferring that heating to the interior space of a home, and thus increasing the need for air conditioning. A white or special “cool color” roof reflects up to 90% of the sunlight that hits it, which keeps that roof cooler in the sun. Because a cool roof transmits less heat into the building it reduces the need for air conditioning by lowering interior building temperatures.

The “coolness” of a roof is determined by a combination of two properties:

- **Solar reflectance** – the amount of sunlight that is reflected, expressed as a fraction.
- **Thermal emittance** – the efficiency with which a surface cools itself by letting go of the heat it has absorbed from sunlight.

Both properties are measured on a scale of 0 to 1 – the higher the values, the cooler the roof.

## Cool Roofs Today Save Energy and Money

Today both white and “cool color” products are available for low-slope and steep-slope roofs. “Cool” choices now exist for most traditional roofing materials—in fact, they don’t look different from traditional shingles; they just have more reflective materials included. Cool roofing should be considered whenever construction, an energy retrofit, or a roof replacement is being planned. It is rarely economical to replace a mechanically sound roof just to increase its solar reflectance. Check [roofcalc.com](http://roofcalc.com) to see if a cool roof would be cost-effective for you.

## How to Select and Buy Cool Roofing Materials

The energy and cost savings that can be achieved by using cool roofing technologies depend on many factors, such as climate and building characteristics.

Three aspects of cool roofing technologies also affect their cost-effectiveness:

- Shingles lose some of their ability to reflect sunlight and let go of the sun’s heat over time. For this reason, energy savings should be based on long-term values of solar reflectance and thermal emittance.
- The incremental initial cost of the cool roof (if any).
- The incremental cost of keeping a cool roof clean and reflective (if any).

- Federal tax credits are available for some cool materials, including asphalt shingles and metal products.
- Many state agencies and utility programs offer incentives for installing cool roofs.
- Cool roof credits are offered in sustainable building programs such as the U.S. Green Building Council’s Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED).
- For low-slope roofs (pitch  $\leq$  2:12), cool thermoplastic membranes, elastomeric coatings, and metal products are available.
- For steep roofs, cool asphalt shingle, clay tile, concrete tile, and metal products are available.
- Cool asphalt shingles cost about the same as conventional asphalt shingles.
- Installing a cool color roof on a home can shave at least 5 to 20% from the cooling costs of your energy bill. Savings vary and are greatest in hot and warm climates. Use the calculator at [roofcalc.com](http://roofcalc.com) to estimate your savings.
- A cool roof may increase the need for heating energy in winter by reflecting sunlight that would otherwise warm the building. Even in mixed climates, however, winter penalties can be smaller than summer savings.

## FURTHER READING

Cool Roof Rating Council Products Directory

[coolroofs.org](http://coolroofs.org)

DOE Building Energy Software Tools Directory

[energy.gov/eere/buildings/listings/software-tools](http://energy.gov/eere/buildings/listings/software-tools)

Energy 101: Cool Roofs

[energy.gov/articles/energy-101-cool-roofs](http://energy.gov/articles/energy-101-cool-roofs)

Energy Saver: Cool Roofs

[energy.gov/energysaver/cool-roofs](http://energy.gov/energysaver/cool-roofs)

ENERGY STAR Cool Roofing Materials

[energystar.gov/products/roof\\_products](http://energystar.gov/products/roof_products)

Cool Roofs Calculator

[roofcalc.com](http://roofcalc.com)

Financial Incentives

Tax credits, incentives, and rebates may be available in your area. Please visit [energystar.gov/about/federal tax credits](http://energystar.gov/about/federal_tax_credits) for more information.