

blow me!

by Fiona McCllymont

Ever thought of installing a windturbine and producing your own electricity? Yes, wind turbines have had some press recently, thanks to a certain national DIY chain selling them and claiming they can easily be installed on the side of your house/flat/whatever. Sounds easy doesn't it?

But according to Christine Griffiths of Aeolus Power, if you buy one of these building-mounted turbines, you'll be completely wasting your time and money.

"The small turbines are not any good at all," says Christine. "They can cause structural damage, vibration, and they don't actually produce enough electricity to make it worth you buying one."



And the reason Christine knows all this is because two years ago, she and her husband set up a company - Aeolus Power (named after a Greek God of wind) - which installs windturbines across the South West of England and offers an advice service for anyone thinking of opting for wind-power.

Christine and her husband set up Aeolus two years ago, after switching to wind power themselves, and going through a lengthy research process to find the best way of doing it.

Aeolus install wind-turbines across the South West and also offer advice to people interested in wind power. "If somebody phones me up and says 'I want a wind turbine, what do I do?' I can take them through every single step - which is what nobody did with me, I had to work it all out myself".

The couple had just moved to a Gloucestershire farmhouse when their first quarterly electricity bill came in at over £2000. Slightly shellshocked, Christine looked into alternative methods of producing energy.

"We originally wanted solar panels, but the planning officer said we absolutely, categorically could not have them because it was a listed building. He then said, 'Have you thought of having a wind turbine?' and the more we looked into it, the more I liked the idea".

She now has a 9m turbine in her orchard and energy-wise the farm is self-sufficient, even selling some back to the national grid. "Originally it was purely a practical decision but I'm so pleased to be able to do something for the environment.

It was quite a complicated process, "Nobody seemed to know anything about wind turbines, we had to find everything out ourselves." says Christine. "Basically you need planning permission; you need confirmation from Western Power that they'll allow you to hook up to the grid; you need the physical space to erect the thing (about 12-15 metres so really you're talking about small-holdings or a company car park); and finally, you need agreement from the Low Carbon Buildings Programme if you want a grant. Otherwise it works out at about £19,000."

And then there's wind-speed. How do you know if your site is windy enough? "Try checking the UK Wind Speed Database website on www.bwea.com/oaabl to see if it's feasible or not," says Christine.

You see, turbines are great if you have the space and a spare field or two for the wind to whistle across, but this is where us city-dwellers hit problems. The trouble is, the more buildings there are around, the more turbulent and unpredictable the wind will be. To get technical for a moment, the aforementioned turbines currently being sold for use in your average city-street are 'horizontal axis turbines' and they don't like

disturbed wind. If there are buildings everywhere, the flow of wind is disrupted and basically they just don't really work. Hence the reason they are a waste of money.

But it's not all bad news. 'Verticalaxis turbines' are currently in development and these ones can handle turbulent air. Christine's advice?

"Having a turbine is a wonderful thing, but wait a year or so until the vertical axis turbines are on public sale. They can be building-mounted and they will do the job. Until then, don't waste your money!"

**FFI: www.aeoluspower.co.uk
for free advice call 01454 633323**