

✘ We tend to think of renewable power as coming in two sizes: single home-sized photovoltaic arrays, or big, remotely-located power plants. Thus, we pour incentive dollars on solar homes, and place a tremendous emphasis on building large new transmission lines. Perhaps it is time to review this approach, and consider what we can do to promote modestly-sized renewable-based generators that can serve more than one customer. There are many options for siting such facilities close to areas of high demand – highway rights-of-way, under-used parking lots, and warehouse roofs, just to name a few.

Enter: the Power Flower. [The Cleantech Group](#) tells us that the Power Flower ✘ is a hybrid power plant, using mirrors to concentrate the sun's heat on a tower reminiscent of a yellow tulip. When the sun shines, the tulip's collected heat runs a turbine, generating electricity. At night, it is heat from a boiler that propels the turbine, fired by biogas, biodiesel, or natural gas. The result is dependable power, available 24 hours a day. This distinguishes the Power Flower from most solar-driven plants, which provide only intermittent output.

The other distinction is that the Power Flower (produced by an Israeli firm called [Aora Solar](#)) is of modest proportions. Covering only half an acre, this amped-up bloom is designed to provide electricity to 70 homes. As such, it introduces the option of relying on community-level power sources, rather than remotely-located central station facilities.

Aora's is not the first technology to offer hybrid power, around-the-clock. Luz's parabolic trough facilities in Southern California have been doing this for more than 20 years. But the Power Flower's modular approach addresses a number of challenges inherent to other concentrated solar technologies. It does not have to be located far from where the power is needed, is not dependent on the use of sensitive desert lands, does not rely on the construction of huge new transmission lines, and does not require additional fossil-fired backup. Rather than serving as an intermittent drain on the grid, this type of approach can be viewed as a plus – providing grid support where needed, and enhancing overall reliability. We should give this type of alternative a closer look, from a public policy perspective.