

GARDEN ROOFS: *A Breath of Fresh*

PICTURE THIS: It is summer in Austin and you are lounging amidst a flourishing garden... on your roof! Whether you live in a house in the suburbs or a loft downtown, if more greenery, improved air quality and a view of the city from your rooftop conjure an appealing image, then a roof garden could be the perfect addition to your life.

You may have heard the terms 'green roof' or 'roof garden' used to describe a garden planted on the rooftop of an apartment building, residential home, or even on a second story terrace balcony.

Although the terms are often used interchangeably, the easiest way to differentiate them is to determine their desired function: A roof or terrace garden is generally accessible as an additional living space and includes not only grass, but also perhaps potted plants and a seating area.

A green or living roof is a sustainably built and managed garden on the roof of a building accessed generally only for maintenance and harvesting purposes.

Austin architect Rick Black of Rick Black Architecture explains that it is important to have your purpose in mind as you design your new home or retro fit your old one. Is your vision environmentally driven because you are intending purely to insulate your house and reduce urban heat OR is it entertainment driven to create an outdoor living space?

Rick points out that if enjoyment were the main interest, accessibility would be of key importance: "You are not going to enjoy a space you cannot easily engage. I envision building a roof garden directly accessible from the master bedroom, with plenty of space up high overlooking the city."

The roof garden trend is slowly finding its way to Austin. Landscape consultant and accredited Green Roof Professional Casey Boyter and architect Lauren Woodward Stanley are co-founders of GRoWERS, a green roof educational group in Austin.

Both are longtime aficionados of sustainable design, who have each recently embarked upon creating their personal green roofs. After only four months harvesting her green roof, Lauren notes some of the advantages she has observed: "It's another green space. It keeps the ambient temperatures down, insulates the art studio below, brings wildlife with its array of flowers and native Texas prairie grasses, uses rainwater to support natural site hydrology, and it's pretty."

With Austin's intense summer heat, a new less wasteful way to cool the home is a "hot" commodity. Who imagined that planting a garden on your rooftop would actually insulate your home and protect your wallet against outrageous A/C bills in the summer (and

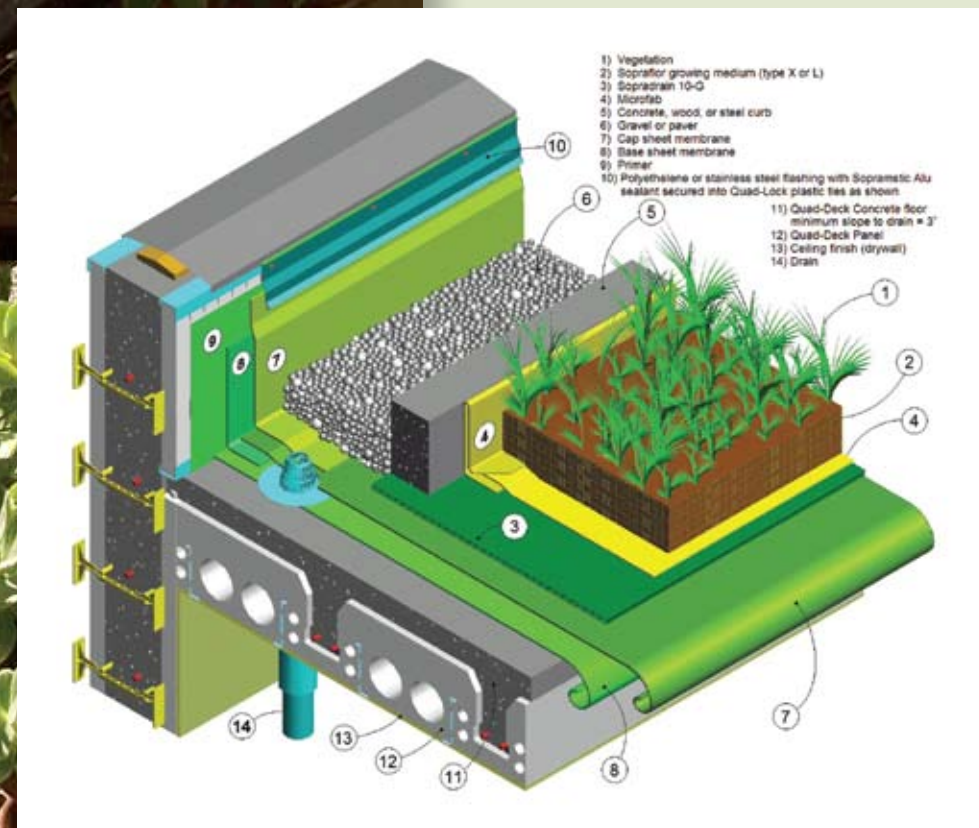


Photo courtesy of Kathleen Zarsky, Assoc. AIA, LEED AP

heating bills in the winter)? In the bigger picture, green roofs actually combat the ill effects of greenhouse emissions, and literally provide you with a "breath of fresh air." Casey further explains how green roofs can mitigate the Urban Heat Island Effect (UHIE), which "is simply the fact that a city's urban core is much hotter than the rural areas because of the increased amount of concrete and asphalt that reflects and stores heat."

As with most projects, once the foundation is in place, you can create an ideal space for your needs. Why not put up a hammock and some lounge chairs, invite the neighbors over and enjoy a nightcap overlooking the city?

Perhaps you want to take your green roof a step further than pure leisure and delve into urban agriculture? You may want to harvest peppermint sprigs to garnish your mint julep or fresh strawberries for a refreshing summer smoothie. The point is, the options are endless, and as with any garden, it's up to you and Mother Nature to find the right green design for you. ♦



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QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER BEFORE GOING GREEN UP THERE:

• What is the purpose of my garden roof? • Will I rely primarily on rainwater and manual watering, or do I need to implement a more

complex hydration system? • Is my living structure able to withstand the weight of sod, water, etc or does it need fortification?