





Before and after pictures of the extensive modular green roof we did at the Reeves building.

All the literature on green roofs says the presence of plants, cooling the roof area somewhat, and the covering of the roof membrane can extend the life of the roofing, but this advantage is a little disingenuous. The roof type recommended for use under a green roof is a 30-year roof, so touting the ability of a green roof to extend roof membrane life to 30 years is actually not saying much. We'll take a pass on that.

### Green Roof Potential

As I sit here at my desk, I look out the window at the gently sloping carriage house roof of my lawyer-turned-landscape-designer neighbor and think she should have a green roof. Her roof has a nice little ridge around its edge to contain green roof modules, and she and her husband would have a greener view from the second floor of the house.

She wasn't convinced. "All the water from the roof stays on the site," she pointed out. "The carriage house isn't heated, so there's no thermal advantage."

"All true," I told her, "BUT the heat island effect is still there, and the benefits of more green in the city, and you're a plant person, so it could be an experiment in your field, AND the District of Columbia has a subsidy of up to \$5 per square foot!"

She decided we ought to look into it after I agreed to come over with my tape measure to measure her historic roof framing to check its adequacy to support a green roof system. She already knew that a green roof is a specialized thing. It isn't a lawn on the roof since grass is not that tolerant of the desiccating heat on roofs. It isn't usually a garden since gardens with vegetables, flowers, shrubs and trees require a lot of soil and thus a lot of structure and a lot of money and so just don't happen that often.

The garden-type green roof is called an "intensive" roof because of the intensity of maintenance required, in contrast to the thinner sedum roofs that are identified as "extensive." The plants found on extensive green roofs are typically sedums: low growing succulents that tolerate hot dry conditions well allowing them to be virtually maintenance free once they're well established. But they're not the kind of plants that can be walked on a lot, so the typical green roof is more for looking than walking on or lolling upon.

I told my neighbor how she ought to have a premium roof system, but since their roof was relatively new, and you can do green roofs that are basically flats of plants – about 1 foot by 2 – the removal process for re-roofing is simple enough to mitigate that concern.

(By the way, my neighbor lawyer-turned-landscape-designer wants everyone to know it's dry again after that wet spring. She said, "IT'S TIME TO WATER AGAIN – After three months of too much rain from April through June, July reverted to the dry pattern of last summer, fall and winter. If you have trees or shrubs planted last year or this, I advise you to water them several times a week either with a soaker hose or a trickle directly at the base of the trunk ... one deep soaking of the root area is much better than many shorter spritzes. Mulch, several inches out to the edge of the branches, helps hold the moisture.")

I'll be back next month to introduce you to a Hill neighbor who has installed a green roof. In the meantime, keep taking care of your garden while you wait to hear about planting your roof and paint your roof light to help with the urban heat island immediately. Come back next month!

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