

GREEN ON TOP

Great for the environment, wallet, health and wellbeing BY HEATHER CYRUS

A “green roof” in Eugene doesn’t mean that there’s moss covering your house. Installing an actual green roof can increase urban green space and reduce negative impacts on air and water.

A green roof, or ecoroof, is a living system that replaces a conventional roof and can be incorporated into new buildings or retrofitted on existing ones. An ecoroof is a thin layer of vegetation growing in substrate of engineered soil on top of a waterproof membrane. In other words, you have plants growing on top of your house. Moss is not a green roof; it’s just wet and messy.

According to Roxi Thoren, assistant professor in the departments of Architecture and Landscape Architecture at UO, green roofs provide environmental benefits including filtering air pollutants, absorbing carbon dioxide, providing habitat for pollinators, reducing the “heat island effect” in which built-up areas get hotter than rural areas, and decreasing stormwater runoff.

Ecoroofs provide economic incentives as well. “There is some debate over the economic benefits, although it is generally accepted that a home or building will stay cooler in the summer with a green roof,” Thoren said. This translates to lower cooling costs.

According to Thoren, the lifespan of a conventional roof ranges anywhere from 15 to 40 years, depending on climate and materials. A green roof may last 50 to 100 years. “What usually breaks down a conventional roof is exposure to vast temperature changes,” Thoren said. Temperatures can change more than 60 degrees in one day on a roof, and the constant freezing and thawing creates an “expand and contract” motion that causes wear and tear. The green roof



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ECOROofs EVERYWHERE)

provides a layer of protection from this process.

Finally, the aesthetic appeal alone convinces many to believe in the power of green roofs. “A living roof can raise property value in the same way that living by a park can,” said Thoren, who designed her current home with a green roof. Additionally, ecoroofs can be noise insulators to help drown out loud neighbors or traffic.

Thoren explains that green roofs are not composed of typical garden dirt; rather, they are made of engineered soil containing 75 percent pumice, 15 percent compost (organic material) and 10 percent sand.

“It’s important to understand that a roof is a nonnative environment,” Thoren said. “Some native species, such as camas, do great because they are dormant in the hot

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