

Taking the 'green' movement off the ground

March 1, 2010 by [Valley Bugler](#)



By Gilman Ouellette

The green movement today is as controversial as ever. Its proponents urge change, citing the ethical implications of our lifestyles, while their opponents cite a lack of financial viability in "going green". But by taking the movement off the ground – literally – we can find options to satisfy both groups.

My geography class at Penn State University class was recently approached by the local government to propose ideas for increasing sustainability in the area, i.e., State College. A group of us chose to explore land use methods that could increase sustainability.

The problem for land use in State College is that all the land is already in use. Much of it is taken up by residential and office space; and what is left is used for agriculture and recreation. This predicament led us to an interesting solution—recycle space. The nascent technology of "green roofs" offers the perfect means of reusing the developed space in the area.

Green roofs are roof structures specifically made to hold a variety of plants and vegetation. While researching for our proposal, we found a wealth of information on these specialty roofs and honestly were quite shocked. Green roofs accord so many benefits, it's a surprise they have yet to see wide spread use.

The surprise lessens when you see the price tag on green roof technology.

Initially, green roofs cost more to install than traditional roofs and sometimes require additional support to build onto existing structures. Although they cost more to install, however, **green roofs last more than twice as long as traditional roofing materials**. Not only do they last much longer, but green roofs also come with a host of benefits, for the wallet and the environment.

Green roofs provide superior insulation that dramatically cuts energy costs. When temperatures outside rise, green roofs keep temperatures inside cool, and when temperatures outside dip, green roofs keep more heat inside. Since green roofs are comprised of living plants, they are also very good at absorbing rain water and preventing storm water runoff. And of course, the vegetation helps remove particulates and CO₂ from the atmosphere.

All in all, there really are few if any reasons not to incorporate green roof cover into any building when they offer decreased energy costs, improved air and water quality, and a longer lifespan, and all for less money over their life span than most roofs we build today. It really is a wonder why there are still so few in America.

Sadly, this great technology is often tossed aside for short-term considerations, seen as unnecessary or too expensive by builders.

Green roofs are perhaps one of the most important advances in environmentally friendly construction to date. Effectively a bridge between the natural and urban landscapes, further advances in green roof technology could bring us to a society that is both technologically sophisticated and acutely involved in the world beyond our own architecture. This is a technology that both capitalists and environmentalists could embrace. Green roofs bring nature into our urban landscapes as never before and cut costs at the same time.

As a country we need to reintroduce ourselves to the "real" world. Bringing nature back into our cities and towns wouldn't just lighten our impact on the environment; it would keep our wallets heavier and our lives richer.

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