



# Growing Up

Gardening on your rooftop can be easy if done correctly. Here, landscape designer Franchesca Watson gives insight on going vertical

**ROOF GARDENS** have a special quality due to the fact that they are not on the ground. They also have a wonderful improbability, a sense of seclusion yet openness and a magical floating quality. Not to mention the magnificent views. These types of gardens also make sense in our crowded and over-stretched world as they make use of space that would otherwise just be a practical bit of engineering to keep out the weather.

**ESCAPE PLAN** Roof gardens need exceptionally good drainage systems and waterproofing. All water, be it rain or irrigation, must be able to find its way through the soil and off the roof easily and quickly. So, ensure that waterproofing and drainage is done properly and professionally, and made to last.

**GROUND CONTROL** Soil is your next important consideration. The depth will determine whether you grow trees on the roof or merely ground covers. Obviously the more soil depth you have – either in containers or over the whole roof – the larger the plants you can grow. Trees will need up to 1 metre, while lawns and ground covers will happily grow in 300 millimetres of soil. But remember, this does not include your drainage layer.

The soil should also drain freely and be of a good quality, as you don't want to be constantly trekking up unwieldy soil-conditioning materials.

**NOT JUST PIE IN THE SKY** Having said all that and because they are part of a man-made structure, there are a number of practical factors to consider before you start gardening.

The building and roof must be engineered to withstand the extra load of watered soil and plants. Not only must the construction of the roof be considered but also the foundations of the building. If you're converting an existing space into a roof garden, it's a good idea to check it out with your engineer first, while new structures can be designed with the roof garden in mind.

**WATER WISE** A good irrigation system is integral to the success of your garden. Drip-irrigation systems work well as roof gardens tend to be breezy.

Feeding the garden will be more critical than an ordinary garden – remember the roots have limited space and the plants will need your help.

A tap somewhere on the roof is useful for cleaning purposes.

**CLIMATE CHECK** Another major consideration is the prevailing weather. Roof gardens are more exposed to wind, temperature and drought than ground-level gardens. You need to understand what the plants are going to have to withstand in terms of temperature, wind direction and velocity in summer and winter, as well as glare from windows or other reflecting surfaces.

**A SELECT FEW** Plants should be carefully chosen to ensure that they thrive. So be realistic or you'll be heartbroken. And don't forget the lighting! ■ Franchesca Watson ☎ 082 808 1287



And they are private by nature, after all who's going to get onto your roof unless they are invited?