

## GENERAL DESCRIPTION

Green roofs, also known as "living roofs" or "rooftop gardens", consist of a thin layer of vegetation and growing medium installed on top of a conventional flat or sloped roof. Green roofs are touted for their benefits to cities, as they improve energy efficiency, reduce urban heat island effects, and create greenspace for passive recreation or aesthetic enjoyment. They are also attractive for their water quality, water balance, and peak flow control benefits. The green roof acts like a lawn or meadow by storing rainwater in the growing medium and ponding areas. Excess rainfall enters underdrains and overflow points and is conveyed in the building drainage system. After the storm, a large portion of the stored water is evapotranspired by the plants, evaporates or slowly drains away.

There are two types of green roofs: intensive and extensive. Intensive green roofs contain greater than 15 cm depth of growing medium, can be planted with deeply rooted plants and are designed to handle pedestrian traffic. Extensive green roofs consist of a thinner growing medium layer (15 cm depth or less) with herbaceous vegetative cover. Guidance here focuses on extensive green roofs.

## DESIGN GUIDANCE

### ROOF STRUCTURE

The load bearing capacity of the roof structure must be sufficient to support the soil and plants of the green roof assembly, as well as the live load associated with maintenance staff accessing the roof. A green roof assembly weighing more than 80 kg per square metre, when saturated, requires consultation with a structural engineer. Green roofs may be installed on roofs with slopes up to 10%. As a fire resistance measure, non-vegetative materials, such as stone or pavers should be installed around all roof openings and at the base of all walls that contain openings.

### WATERPROOFING SYSTEM

The first layer above the roof surface is a waterproofing membrane. Two common waterproofing techniques are monolithic and thermoplastic sheet membranes. Another option is a liquid-applied inverted roofing membrane assembly system in which the insulation is placed over the waterproofing, which adheres to the roof structure. An additional protective layer is generally placed on top of the membrane followed by a physical or chemical root barrier. Once the waterproofing system has been installed it should be fully tested prior to construction of the drainage system. Electronic leak detection systems should also be installed at this time if desired.

### DRAINAGE LAYER

The drainage system includes a porous drainage layer and a geosynthetic filter mat to prevent fine growing medium particles from clogging the porous media. The drainage layer can be made up of gravels or recycled-polyethylene materials that are capable of water retention and efficient drainage. The depth of the drainage layer depends on the load bearing capacity of the roof structure and the stormwater retention requirements. The porosity of the drainage layer should be greater than or equal to 25%.

### CONVEYANCE AND OVERFLOW

Once the porous media is saturated, all runoff (infiltrate or overland flow) should be directed to a traditional roof storm drain system. Landscaping style catch basins should be installed with the elevation raised to the desired ponding elevation. Alternately, roof drain flow restrictors can be used. Excess runoff can be directed through roof leaders to another stormwater BMP such as a rain barrel, soakaway, bioretention area, swale or simply drain to a pervious area.

### GROWING MEDIUM

The growing medium is usually a mixture of sand, gravel, crushed brick, compost, or organic matter combined with soil. The medium ranges between 40 and 150 mm in depth and increases the roof load by 80 to 170 kg per square metre when fully saturated. The sensitivity of the receiving water to which the green roof ultimately drains should be taken into consideration when selecting the growing medium mix. Green roof growing media with less compost in the mix will leach less nitrogen and phosphorus. Low nutrient growing media also promotes the dominance of stress-tolerant native plants. Fertilizer applied to the growing medium during production and the period during which vegetation is becoming established should be coated controlled release fertilizer to reduce the risk of damage to vegetation and leaching of nutrients into overflowing runoff. Fertilizer applications should not exceed 5 g of nitrogen per square metre.

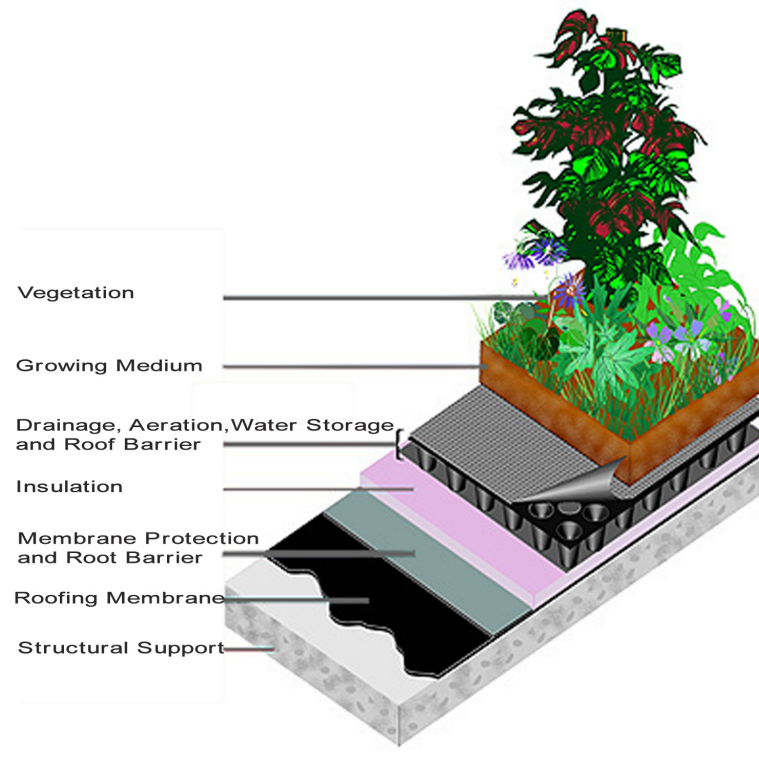
### MODULAR SYSTEMS

Modular systems are trays of vegetation in a growing medium that are prepared and grown off-site and placed on the roof for complete coverage. There are also pre-cultivated vegetation blankets that are grown in flexible growing media structures, allowing them to be rolled out onto the green roof assembly. The advantage of these systems is that they can be removed for maintenance.



Green Rooftops are composed of:

- A roof structure capable of supporting the weight of a green roof system;
- A waterproofing system designed to protect the building and roof structure;
- A drainage layer that consists of a porous medium capable of water storage for plant uptake;
- A geosynthetic layer to prevent fine soil media from clogging the porous media;
- Soil with appropriate characteristics to support selected green roof plants;
- Plants with appropriate tolerance for harsh rooftop conditions and shallow rooting depths.



### GREEN ROOF LAYERS

(Source: Great Lakes Water Institute)

## ABILITY TO MEET SWM OBJECTIVES

BMP	Water Balance Benefit	Water Quality Improvement	Stream Channel Erosion Control Benefit
Green Rooftops	Yes	Yes	Yes

## GENERAL SPECIFICATIONS

ASTM International released the following Green Roof standards in 2005:

- E2396-05 Standard Test Method for Saturated Water Permeability of Granular Drainage Media;
- E2397-05 Standard Determination of Dead Loads and Live Loads associated with Green Roof Systems;
- E2398-05 Standard test method for water capture and media retention of geocomposite drain layers for green roof systems;
- E2399-05 Standard Test Method for Maximum Media Density for Dead Load Analysis of Green Roof Systems; and
- E2400-06 Standard Guide for Selection, Installation, and Maintenance of Plants for Green Roof Systems.

Although the Ontario Building Code (2006) does not specifically address the construction of green roofs, requirements from the Building Code Act and Division B may apply to components of the construction. Further requirements from sections 2.4 and 2.11 of the 1997 Ontario Fire Code also require consideration.



## COMMON CONCERNS

### WATER DAMAGE TO ROOF

While failure of waterproofing elements may present a risk of water damage, a warranty can ensure that any damage to the waterproofing system will be repaired. Leak detection systems can also be installed to minimize or prevent water damage.

### VEGETATION MAINTENANCE

Extreme weather conditions can have an impact on plant survival. Appropriate plant selection will help to ensure plant survival during weather extremes. Irrigation during the first year may be necessary in order to establish vegetation. Vegetation maintenance costs decrease substantially after the first two years.

### COLD CLIMATE

Green roofs are a feasible BMP for cold climates. Snow can protect the vegetation layer and once thawed, will percolate into the growing medium and is either absorbed or drained away just as it would during a rain event. No seasonal adjustments in operation are needed.

### COST

An analysis to determine cost effectiveness for a given site should include the roof lifespan, energy savings, stormwater management requirements, aesthetics, market value, tax and other municipal incentives. It is estimated that green roofs can extend the life of a roof structure by as long as 20 years by reducing exposure of the materials to sun and precipitation. They can also reduce energy demand by as much as 75%.

### ON PRIVATE PROPERTY

Property owners or managers will need to be educated on their routine operation and maintenance needs, understand the long-term maintenance plan, and may be subject to a legally binding maintenance agreement. An incentive program such as a storm sewer user fee based on the area of impervious cover on a property that is directly connected to a storm sewer could be used to encourage property owners or managers to maintain existing practices.

## CONSTRUCTION CONSIDERATIONS

An experienced professional green roof installer should install the green roof. The installer must work with the construction contractor to ensure that the waterproofing membrane installed is appropriate for use under a green roof assembly. Conventional green roof assemblies should be constructed in sections for easier inspection and maintenance access to the membrane and roof drains. Green roofs can be purchased as complete systems from specialized suppliers who distribute all the assembly components, including the waterproofing membrane. Alternatively, a green roof designer can design a customized green roof and specify suppliers for each component of the system.



## OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE

- Green roof maintenance is typically greatest in the first two years as plants are becoming established. Vegetation should be monitored to ensure dense coverage. A warranty on the vegetation should be included in the construction contract.
- Regular operation of a green roof includes irrigation and leak detection. Watering should be based on actual soil moisture conditions as plants are designed to be drought tolerant. Electronic leak detection is recommended. This system, also used with traditional roofs, must be installed prior to the green roof.
- Ongoing maintenance should occur at least twice per year and should include weeding to remove volunteer seedlings of trees and shrubs and debris removal. In particular, the overflow conveyance system should be kept clear.

## SITE CONSIDERATIONS



**Roof Slope**  
Green roofs may be installed on roofs with slopes up to 10%.



**Drainage Area & Runoff Volume**  
Green roofs are designed to capture precipitation falling directly onto the roof surface. They are not designed to receive runoff diverted from other source areas.



**Structural Requirements**  
Load bearing capacity of the building structure and selected roof deck need to be sufficient to support the weight of the soil, vegetation and accumulated water or snow, and may also need to support pedestrians, concrete pavers, etc.

CVC/TRCA LOW IMPACT DEVELOPMENT  
PLANNING AND DESIGN GUIDE - FACT SHEET

GREEN ROOFS