



Growing Green

LIVING ROOFS ARE BLOOMING IN MILWAUKEE

Writer **Lori Vanover** Photographer **Lori Vanover**

Milwaukee is adding green space, but not where you might expect. Not on the ground, but high up in the air — on rooftops.

Our city hasn't caught up with Toronto yet, the only city in North America to mandate green roofs on new construction, but several installations already exist with more projects in the works.

One striking example can be seen above Kane Commons, a residential development on the East Side. From a vantage point on top of a soon-to-be completed home, several vibrant green roofs are visible.

One of these roofs blooms on top of developer Julilly Kohler's future home. "This has been a dream of mine. Ever since I heard about green roofs, I wanted one," says Kohler.

The plantings provide many practical benefits, including sound insulation, reducing water runoff, keeping a building cooler (and thereby reducing air conditioning costs) and doubling or even tripling the life of the roof because of lower UV exposure.

Kane Commons worked with LiveRoof, a Michigan-based company, to grow and supply the plants for their rooftops.

LiveRoof president David McKenzie says he uses low-maintenance perennials such as sedum and allium that can survive on as little as one inch of rain per month, and will grow in just a few inches of soil.

"Every time a building is constructed, green space is eliminated," McKenzie says. "A living roof offers a solution to this problem."

McKenzie says his company works with local roofers and landscapers to complete a green roof installation, which averages about \$20-\$30 per square foot. Performance Roofing

Systems of Richfield completed the rooftop plantings at Kane Commons. Some other local companies with experience working on green roofs include David J. Frank Landscaping, Pioneer Roofing, Langer Roofing, M.M. Schranz Roofing, Roberts Roofing, American Landscape and Stano Landscaping.

Green roofs top the Milwaukee Central Library, MillerCoors Brewery, Grohmann Museum at MSOE, Columbia St. Mary's hospital and three Housing Authority developments — Highland Gardens, Cherry Court and Convent Hill. Additionally, the Silver City Townhomes, a residential development slated for the city's south side will soon include green roofs, a feature made possible by a grant from the Milwaukee Metropolitan Sewerage District.

Before installing a green roof, it's important to consult a structural engineer, landscapers and roofing professionals about slope, drainage and support concerns. If you're not ready or able to commit to a fully planted surface, consider installing a few beds or containers. Don't be afraid to get creative, like Swee and Lisa Sim, owners of Future Green/Café Tarragon in Bay View, who are growing organic produce on their store's roof.

"This year, we have tomatoes, peppers and herbs in our rooftop garden. We plan to use the herbs in our café," says Swee Sim. "The vegetable scraps from our café go to our worms, and their waste goes to our rooftop garden. It's a closed loop sustainable system."

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