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Cover Story: Sky-scaping

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Landscape Management



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The short of it is that a green roof is one partially or substantially covered with plants. The long of it is that it offers experienced landscape contractors the opportunity to challenge their teams to learn new skills in an emerging market. And did we mention profit potential?



"Although green roofs are still considered a novelty in some parts of North America, they're not new," says Sandra McCullough, a LEED Accredited Professional with Weston Solution's GreenGrid Green roofing systems. "Green roofs are relatively common in Europe where they have topped buildings for several decades. In fact, it is estimated that more than 100 million square feet of green roofs have been installed in Europe. And in Germany, one in eight buildings of all shapes and sizes and for all types of uses now has a green roof."

American Society of Landscape Architects, Green Roof Project, Washington D.C.

When the Chicago City Hall green roof was completed in 2001, designed by Weston Solutions Inc., many considered it an oddity. Today, there are more than 200 green roofs existing or under way in Chicago, covering some 2.5 million sq. ft. of roof area on office buildings, hospitals, fast-food restaurants, schools, firehouses and big-box retailers.

Chicago isn't alone. Cities from coast to coast are jumping on the green roof bandwagon. For instance, the Gap Inc. headquarters in San Bruno, CA, has a green roof, as does the Ford Motor Co. plant in Dearborn, MI. Even the American Society of Landscape

Opinion Survey

The busy spring season can make or break a landscaping business. What are you most concerned about for your business as we move into the busy spring season?

Finding quality labor

The weather: droughts, floods, water restrictions, snow, etc.

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Architects building in Washington, D.C., now has a green roof. A study by Green Roofs for Healthy Cities found that the number of square feet of roof area covered with green roofing in 2005 was up as much as 80% over previous years.



Eastern Village, Silver Spring Maryland

The reasons to install green roofs are many. They include:

- **Storm water reduction.** Green roofs can retain as much as 100% of a 1-in. rainfall. As a result, runoff is eliminated or, in a larger downpour, spread out over several hours to help minimize its impact on sewer systems.
- **Longer roof life.** Green roofs can double the life expectancy of an existing roof by moderating temperature swings and protecting the roof from ultraviolet rays.
- **Energy savings.** Because of the insulating qualities of green roofs, overall roof temperature is reduced, which can result in lower cooling costs in summer and heating costs in winter. These insulating qualities also help quiet the facility.
- **Reduction in "heat island" effect.** Partly because of conventional roofing systems, city downtown districts can be several degrees warmer than outlying areas due to the heat radiating from office towers and other structures. Green roofs help reduce that heat.
- **Improved air quality.** As with all landscaping, plants absorb carbon dioxide and release oxygen. They also trap airborne particulates and pollutants.



601 Congress Street, Seaport District, Boston, MA

Although many facilities are installing green roofs solely to take advantage of these benefits, in several cities, builders can also receive a variety of incentives to install green roofs.

Chicago, for example, has a pilot program that provides up to \$100,000 in matching funds to any developer retrofitting an existing downtown building with a green roof. The program has a total of \$500,000 available. Some cities award special grants or tax credits to developers and homeowners who install a green roof. And various localities expedite the building permit process, which can be extensive, time-consuming and cumbersome in some cities — for any builder who installs a green roof on a new structure.

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