



Introduction

Gardening on high is a matter of extremes – the sun is hotter, the wind is stronger, the prices higher, the seclusion and excitement amazing.

One of the most extreme things about creating or updating a roof or terrace garden, which is pretty much common to every case, is the lack of soil beneath your feet. You are making a garden in an environment that has no natural plants or trees, everything will have to be brought in – and you are in control. Talk about a blank canvas!

And that's the way it is with roof and terrace gardens. What might be seen as a restriction (not having any soil is going to scupper lots of plans), can be turned into a great benefit if you work with it and think in terms of containers, minimalism, structural planting.

So it's worth looking at the restrictions and benefits of roof gardens in general and thinking about how they apply to your space in particular before you do anything else.



This architectural plant design is set off by the modern planter from Urbis Design.

Benefits of a roof or terrace garden

Creates another room Making the most of a terrace or roof will effectively make another room or at least add more usable space to your home.

Adds value to a property Making another room will increase the value of your property.

Environmental benefits Every time you put a plant on a roof you are helping the environment in lots of ways – any greenery is welcome in cities.

Makes the most of any great views Hopefully you will get some amazing views from up above – even a view across other rooftops can be enchanting.

Privacy The garden is less likely to be overlooked than one at ground level.

Freedom to express yourself That privacy also means you are less likely to have visual references for the garden. You can do what you like with the design of the space and not worry about it clashing with what is around it.

Sun It will probably be very sunny and light and unlikely to have the deep shadows of a garden at ground level.

Low maintenance Because there's no soil there naturally, it's easy to have fewer plants – and that means lower maintenance. So, if you want to, you get the fresh air and a lovely place to sit without any of the hassle of a garden.

Disadvantages and difficulties of creating a roof or terrace garden

Practical restrictions Weight, access etc. I've devoted a whole chapter of this book to these points as it's important to get these absolutely right, but don't be put off. Apart from anything else (like the enjoyment you will get from it), the garden is likely to be a sound investment.

Wind Above ground level the wind tends to be stronger and you need to be careful to make sure nothing can blow off. Also, make sure there are sheltered places to sit out of the wind.

Watering All that wind and sun and lack of soil will mean any plants you do have will dry out quickly and need a lot of additional watering. An automatic system will probably be a good idea if you're having anything other than extremely minimal planting.

No soil This can be an advantage if you don't want plants and don't like gardening, but if you do want some plants the soil or compost will have to be brought to the site and its weight will have to be accommodated on the roof.

Tend to be small Again, if all you want to do is sit in the sun, small can be beautiful, but if you have ideas of rolling acres, it's just not going to happen on a roof.



Making a terrace or roof garden

There is a real growing movement to make the most of roofs and terraces – for environmental reasons, and to make the most of every last inch of available space in, on or around the home.

Sarah Bevin from Urban Roof Gardens, a company specialising in creating gardens in the sky, answers some questions that will help get you started ...



This London garden by Urban Roof Gardens takes on a new feel at night when the lights in the garden match the excitement of the city around.

Q&A

Can I make a terrace or roof garden?

Three things you will need – if you don't have these it's a non-starter.

- Space outside that belongs to you and you are allowed to use. (Check the deeds of your property.)
- The space needs to be load bearing or can be reinforced to be load bearing.
- You will need to have access to the space – possibly through a door or window.

Can I have a roof garden if my roof is pitched?

It's easier to make a usable space if the roof is flat but even if you have a pitched roof it's not impossible to make a garden outside. One way is to cut into the roof to make a flat space – a kind of inverted dormer.

What else might stop me having a terrace or roof garden?

Planning and building regulations. Always ask your local planning department before you start. The Royal Town Planning Institute says roof gardens usually require planning consent if they overlook other properties or if the creation of the terrace includes the building of substantial walls or major work such as installing an additional staircase; there may also be other issues specific to your space, so it's always best to check.

Anything else?

Privacy issues often dictate the amount of space you can make usable and the planning may stipulate screening.

What if there's a window to the space but no door?

A window opening out onto a terrace can be changed into a door by making use of the existing structural opening – so no new lintels.

What if there's a ladder to the roof but no proper staircase? Should I put in a spiral staircase?

A proper staircase will take up more room both inside the house and on the roof than the ladder but easier access may be a priority for you. A spiral staircase actually takes up more ground space than a conventional staircase and can be more difficult to negotiate.

How much will it cost?

You know what I'm going to say ... it all depends. The more structural work that needs doing, the more the basic cost will be. Structural work includes things like putting in barriers, reinforcing the roof, and once that's done, it's possible to spend an awful lot on furniture, lighting and accessories if you want to. But remember that creating a whole new, usable area for a house will add to its value.

Where's the best place to start?

Look at this book, obviously, but also I would ask an architect with experience in roof gardens to have a look and give you an idea of the feasibility of what you have in mind. Specialist firms such as the Urban Roof Gardens team include architects and structural engineers with huge experience in this area.

How do you begin the design of the terrace or roof garden?

One thing we ask: do you want the space connected completely to the house because it is an outside room and visually linked to the house, or do you go for the unexpected? Away from ground level you may feel freer to express yourself, so the design can be liberated from restrictions. Also ask yourself what you want from the roof or terrace and how you will use it. Questions like: will you go out or just view it? Do you want wildlife and greenery or a smart outdoor room?

Can I have a proper garden with plants and trees?

Usually planting is in containers or raised beds and these can be big enough to contain trees, the main restriction will be on weight. Planting can also be grown directly onto the roof using a lightweight growing medium – this is common in 'green roofs' (see Chapter 10).

This book

PART 1 INFORMATION

The first half of the book goes through the information you will need to plan and create a roof garden.

PART 2 INSPIRATION

The second half of the book features 10 different rooftop and terrace gardens.

Part I Information

There's a very logical way to design and lay out any garden, a sequence to go through to get to the garden that you want and which will suit the space.

Overall the process is the same for any garden and it goes like this ...

1. Gather information about the site.
2. Gather information about what you want from the site.
3. Get inspiration for the design
4. Put the design together – make the spaces.
5. Decide how to form those spaces with vertical and horizontal elements.
6. Add decorative elements and planting.



However, there is a difference with roof and terrace gardens, the information you gather about the site needs to be very specific and detailed. What's beneath your feet cannot be taken for granted – it's not solid earth. Nowhere, in any other part of garden-making, is the technology of the structure more interdependent with the design.

CHAPTER 1: Is your roof ready for a garden?

So, where normally I'd try to start with something positive and inspirational, I've started this book with the practicalities. These so dominate the design, the planting, everything about roof and terrace gardens, it's worth putting them front and centre in the book.

CHAPTER 2: Gathering information

This goes through the 'normal' process of design – gathering information about the garden and about what you want from it.

CHAPTER 3: Creating spaces

This brings all of this information together to start creating spaces within the garden – creating the design.

CHAPTER 4: Walls and floors

This goes through the options of how these rooms might be created – how the walls and the floors of the new space are made.

CHAPTER 5: Containers

Most planting on terraces and roofs will be in containers and they can also form a major part of the design so I've put in a whole chapter on how to design with them and how to plant them up.

CHAPTER 6: Water features

To find a water feature on a roof garden goes against expectations and that makes putting one in all the more exciting.

CHAPTER 7: Sculpture

Sculpture can really come into its own on a roof. When planting will probably be limited, art can add to the atmosphere and mood of the garden.

CHAPTER 8: Lighting

This is especially important if you can see the garden from inside the house. After dark it will be wonderful to replace that daytime view with an equally spectacular night-time one.

CHAPTER 9: Plants

Roof and terrace gardens present special environments for plants. Here's a directory of those that can cope, and look great.

CHAPTER 10: Green roofs

Green roofs are a special type of roof garden, designed mainly for the plants and the environment rather than for people to use; they are suited to roofs that are too small or structurally not able to take people.