

The Green Piece...a weekly column by ENTS students

The grass is always greener...on a green roof

BY JADE HOYER

What if the whole balcony section of Sevy had one big green roof? It'd be like the Bald Spot, but better. You could do homework up there, have parties, and undoubtedly someone would crack his skull open within a week chasing a frisbee. Yup, it would be sweet to have a green roof. But did you know we already have one?

Our very own green roof is on top of the storage closet in Olin, over by the loading dock. Other schools have green roofs: Michigan State University, University of New Hampshire, Penn State University, Carnegie Mellon University, and Swarthmore College. Their roofs

tend to be larger than a storage closet, too. The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill is building a \$70 million parking garage with a green roof. We are, though, one of the first schools to have a green roof built by students.

A green roof is a pretty simple, if expensive, concept: take one preferably waterproofed roof, add a plastic semi-permeable plastic drainage system, 4-6" of a high mineral content/ low organic matter content soil (so it's airy and a better insulator), and finish by planting about 180 different types of plants. If all goes well, your plants will take root, and you'll have your own little microhabitat up there. And then the environmental benefits are numerous.

A green roof controls storm water runoff, and the soil filters the water.

It creates a pseudo-natural habitat on top of the building. A green roof isn't supposed to function as any sort of replacement for a natural area, but it's certainly a more environmentally friendly alternative to an ordinary roof.

Green roofs can reduce urban heat island effect by not absorbing and redirecting heat as your average roof does. Kind of like walking barefoot on a field as opposed to, oh, a parking lot on a summer day.

A green roof acts as an insulator, especially in keeping a building cool in the summer. Our green roof, for example, reduces energy needs for air conditioning

by 30% during summer months.

Besides, it's cool just to see something like grass and flowers up there, as opposed to a black rubber roof. Check out this site if you're interested: www.greenroofs.com

Students Jason Lord, Jake Gold, and Dave Holman have been researching greenroofs as an independent study since last fall. Now five students are taking "Greenroof Research" as a 1-3 credit independent study, with classwork ranging from designing a web page to calculating the insulation value of the roof under different conditions. You can do this next term, too! Contact Jason, lordj, for more information.

Jade Hoyer is a member of the class of 2007.