

TOP IT OFF

By Michelle Theriault | McClatchy-Tribune

Green roofs gaining ground across country

Teresa Williams and David Leppanen's roof is alive. Last fall, the Bellingham, Wash., couple installed what they believe to be one of the first green roofs in the area, and now it's in full spring bloom. Already popular in Europe for their environmental benefits and aesthetic pleasures, green roofs are becoming in-demand in the United States.

Today, when they look out of their living room window, they see saxifrage, flowering rosettes of houseleeks and eggplant-colored tulips.

For Williams and Leppanen, the practical and philosophical bonuses of the garden over their heads had appeal.

"I hate the idea of paving over the Earth," says Williams, a prosecutor for the Lummi Nation tribe.

This, she says, is the opposite. The idea of a garden roof is nothing new — they go back to the hanging gardens of Babylon and centuries-old turf roofs of Viking settlements. In Europe, they're well established: An estimated 10 percent of all roofs in Germany are green. But in the United States, they're just catching on.

Green roofs, eco-roofs or vegetated roofs, as they're called, are increasingly being touted as a way to beautify concrete-bound urban areas, regulate global warming and spare rivers from stormwater contamination.

The couple — 1974 Western

Washington University grads who returned to Bellingham in 2001 after two decades living in Alaska — wanted to expand their home with a shop. Williams didn't want to look out on a bare roof, so they decided on a green roof: Something they hoped would be beautiful and functional.

A green roof can help regulate temperature, and absorb stormwater, which runs off slowly instead of pouring down in buckets and overwhelming sewer systems.

"It's not cheap, but the expense is worth it," says Leppanen, a general contractor. "You can't do this in a

insulation and help keep it cooler in the summertime, and warmer in the wintertime," says Leppanen.

It's also beautiful. The 750-square-foot roof garden is the focal point of the whole house, says Williams.

Check with experts

To build theirs, Williams and Leppanen consulted with Patrick Carey, a Seattle-based expert on the topic.

He told them that a green roof must have three main elements to be successful. It can't leak, can't be too heavy, and must sustain the greenery growing on it.

Because Leppanen was building the shop from scratch, he angled the roof to absorb the increased weight of soil and vegetation.

They used a rubber lining (much like a pond liner), a drainage mat and a soil layer (a mix of crushed lava rock, sand,

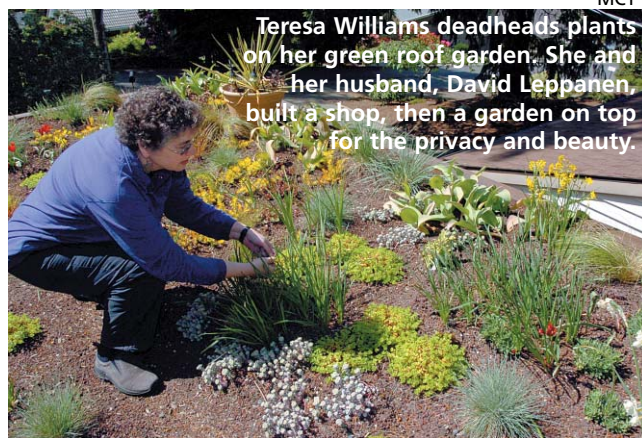
composted soil and water retention granules). They needed plants that would tolerate drought conditions, require only six inches of soil and thrive in heavy exposure.

They covered the area with more than 500 flower bulbs, several flats of grasses and many varieties of sedum and saxifrage. After a rainy winter, their roof is in full bloom.

Steller's jays, finches, chickadees, squirrels and robins also have stopped by to admire it and search for seeds.

But the best part, says Williams, is morning coffee in the living room while looking out on the green patch.

"(It's a) mediation garden that flows directly out from the windows," she says, "and provides a beautiful screen from the street." ♦



MCT
Teresa Williams deadheads plants on her green roof garden. She and her husband, David Leppanen, built a shop, then a garden on top for the privacy and beauty.

weekend with plastic bags and dirt and just hope for the best," says Williams.

Proper planning

High-quality materials are essential, because a poorly built green roof can cause structural damage to a home by compressing the roof or leaking. It will increase building costs 20 to 35 percent, Leppanen says. A project like their green roof might cost around \$30,000, says Leppanen.

Because Leppanen did much of the work and design himself, their total cost was lower.

There's a potential to recoup some of those costs, because the vegetation can act like insulation.

"I would think that if it was over living space ... a green roof is going to give you more

Short-Term Interest Rates on the Rise

By John M. Wolf, Senior Loan Consultant, CMPS | Home Loan Experts

Adjustable Rate Mortgage Holders Prepare for Increase in Interest Rates

Salinas, CA
Interest rates are on the rise and many home owners who have adjustable rate mortgages may see increases in their forthcoming annual adjustments.

With the economy moving strongly forward, inflation is on the rise — which also means that home loan rates are on the rise. And over two trillion dollars in Adjustable Rate Mortgage (ARM) loans are set to start adjusting in the next two years.

Federal Reserve Chairman Ben Bernanke made it clear with his recent rate hike bringing the Fed Funds Rate to 5.25% that the Federal Reserve will not shy away from future rate increases if they feel it is needed.

Consumers with revolving debt accounts tied to the prime rate have seen the effect through rising interest rate charges, as the prime rate always rides 3% above the current Fed Funds Rate.

Mortgage interest rates are affected indirectly by these changes. An increase in the Fed Funds Rate has an impact on financial markets as a whole, but mortgage rates may go up or down based on the perception investors have of current economic statistics and their reaction to the Federal Reserve's after-meeting statements.

In general, when economic data indicates we have a slow-down occurring in our economy, investors tend to sell off stocks and reallocate that money to the safe haven of bonds and mortgage-backed securities. The purchase of mortgage-backed securities drives interest rates down. When economic data says there is growth in the economy, the stock market typically rallies and mortgage-backed securities sell off to fuel that stock market rally. This drives mortgage interest rates up.

Our current market reflects the reaction

of investors reading between the lines on comments made by the Fed, and mortgage interest rates are going up. This will have an affect on home owners with adjustable rate mortgages (ARMs) tied to indexes that are based on short-term interest rates. This includes the 11th District Cost of Funds, 12-Month Treasury Average (MTA), London Inter Bank Offering Rates (LIBOR) and others.

This doesn't mean that everyone with an adjustable mortgage is in trouble right away. Some indexes are more volatile than others. COFI moves much slower than other adjustable rate indexes, while the LIBOR fluctuates with more volatility. But remember, when an ARM adjusts, the new interest rate is a sum of the borrower's fixed margin plus the current rate of the index the mortgage is tied to.

Consumers who foresee paying an interest rate that is significantly higher may want to consider refinancing to take advantage of the stability of a fixed rate mortgage.

This is also a good time for borrowers who started out in an adjustable rate loan due to a poor credit score to transition into a fixed rate loan if they can. Once a track record of making mortgage payments on time and in full has been established, this should have a positive effect on the credit score and there's a good chance the borrower may now qualify for a loan with a lower interest rate.

As with any decision to refinance, it is important to take the terms of the existing loan, the cost of the new loan, and the borrower's long-term needs into consideration. A qualified mortgage professional should help weigh out the options by providing a clear assessment of available loan programs for the consumer.

John M. Wolf is affiliated with Home Loan Experts, a division of World Savings. A free consultation and a 10-Year History of ARM Indexes are available by calling 831-443-9587 or by emailing me at john@wolfhomemortgage.com. ♦

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