**Getting Urban Gardening off the Ground**

Rooftop Gardens further increase available space for urban edibles.

by Timothy Sexauer

When in the course of human events, the residents of Avalon have utilized all the space around their homes for planting edible plants, one need only look up to see yet more bountiful potential. In other words: food can be planted on top of a house as well as around it.

Human record of people growing plants on rooftops goes back thousands of years to ancient Mesopotamia, and these days we see a resurgence of it everywhere from the crowded condominiums of Tokyo to the flora-covered rooftop of Chicago’s City Hall. Mayor Bob Kennedy, Local builder Pete Edwards and others around town think that Avalon would also be an ideal place to make use of this ancient trick.

Spacing limitations and hungry mule deer are the primary reasons. As Kennedy says on the topic of rooftop gardens in Avalon: “Having the issue with deer, that’s a pretty good alternative. I’m having a heck of a time keeping the deer off of my house from eating the plants that are supposed to be deer-safe.”

The simplest way to start a garden on any fairly level surface is by container planting. See this week’s Islander gardening article by Scott Struges for details on how to get started with container planting. The mixture he recommends of vermiculite, peat moss, and compost is great for rooftop or deck gardens since the vermiculite and peat moss are very lightweight.

As Edwards and Tim Canby, local-building-inspecting engineer, say, the most stable place for planting containers is over existing wall structures. They recommend raising the containers off the roof surface, such as with two-by-fours, in order to facilitate water drainage and flow. They also both stress that every house is different and calls for different considerations.

Canby says, “I think every one is probably gonna be different because of where the sun is and how do you get up there and all this kind of stuff.”

Edwards adds, “Or how is it built? It’s not all the same, so each ones gonna gave it’s own issues, like how old is it? The newer stuff’s gonna be thicker and heavier than old stuff.”

If one is going to go beyond a modest container garden and install raised beds or any other installation that requires structural modification in order to be supported, then as City Building Inspector Bryan Zuppiger says, the endeavor would require the approval of an engineer such as Canby in order to pass a city inspection. It is significantly more expensive than container gardening, but if anyone wants to get creative and have a professionally installed rooftop garden, Edwards says that his company, Fine Line Construction would love to get the job done.

As you are looking at your home’s structure, envisioning growing your own produce, if any quick questions arise, both Edwards and Canby welcome you to send them an email with your query. Happy gardening!

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