



In the final part of this three-part miniseries, **Paul Newman** shares his knowledge on plant choices for rooftop terraces, and how to care for them

# UP IN THE AIR

Roof terraces can be a harsh environment for plants, so they need to be chosen wisely. Most are open to the elements, with little or no shade. Wind is a problem, as there will be none of the natural windbreaks – trees, fences or buildings – found in ground level gardens. Plants with delicate or very fine leaves should be avoided, as they will dry out with the combination of strong winds and hot sun.

A rooftop environment can be hot, dry and windy; with this in mind, many dry-climate plants will do well, as they have to put up with intense summer heat and drought. Their leaves will be smaller and lose less moisture through transpiration, often being tough or leathery with a grey-green colour to reflect sunlight – good examples would be lavender or olive trees. Hailing from extremely arid and hot environments, cacti and succulents have taken this to another level, having little to no leaves. Their fleshy,

elongated stems store water, with spines to protect them from grazing animals. Coastal plants are also good candidates, as they can endure very windy conditions.

Many of these plants are architectural in shape and form, and look superb planted in a container and used against a plain backdrop so that their shape can be appreciated. Lighting these will throw amazing spiky shadows across a wall, to further enhance their form.

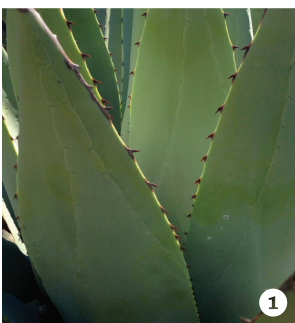
Hardy palms can also make great focal points. *Chamaerops humilis* is better than *Trachycarpus* in windy locations, as it has smaller, stiffer leaves and a more compact shape. A number of yuccas and agaves are also hardy enough to use. In many arid habitats throughout

the world it can freeze at night, but it is a dry frost – so if you are using these plants, add plenty of grit and drainage material to your planting medium, as the drainage needs to be good. The sharp tips of the leaves can be painful, so careful consideration is needed when positioning.

Plants on roof terraces cannot take up ground moisture like they would in a garden. This, together with the strong sunlight and wind, means that a

“**ROOF TERRACES CAN BE A HARSH ENVIRONMENT FOR PLANTS TO THRIVE IN, SO THEY NEED TO BE CHOSEN WISELY**”

## PAUL RECOMMENDS...



1



2



3



4



5

- 1 Agave leaf detail: highly architectural but deadly sharp
- 2 Agapanthus africanus: great in containers and loves summer heat
- 3 Grasses with *Cordyline australis*
- 4 *Chamaerops humilis*, the European fan palm
- 5 Tough, leathery leaves adapt well to dry conditions

planter in summer will quickly heat up and dry out. To prevent this, and to enable a wider range of plants to be grown, it's best to install an automated irrigation system. Early in the build, get all your first fix plumbing and electrics in place, and run a main water supply pipe around the perimeter, or to wherever you intend to have plants. From here you can branch off with smaller drip feeders to individual planters, or in rows if using a long trough. We use drippers with adjustable heads, which give the benefit of being able to control the amount of water delivered to individual plants. The system is best controlled by a small irrigation timer, which can be connected to a rainwater harvesting unit. Set this up to your plant's watering requirement cycles, and leave your client time to enjoy their newly planted roof terrace.

### ABOUT PAUL NEWMAN

Paul Newman Landscapes provides a complete landscaping service from concept to completion for clients throughout London and Hertfordshire, offering high quality individual design and build projects to suit any client's style and budget. [www.paulnewmanlandscapes.co.uk](http://www.paulnewmanlandscapes.co.uk)