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County Executive



**Department of
Environmental
Resources**

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Director

Cisterns Fact Sheet

What is a cistern?



A cistern is a sealed tank used to collect rainwater that flows from your rooftop and store it for non-potable, exterior uses, such as landscape irrigation and car washing. Generally larger than rain barrels, cisterns have capacities ranging from 100 gallons to several thousand gallons and can collect water from several downspouts from one building's roof or from multiple roofs.



What are the benefits to property owners and communities?

- ▮ Provides a supplemental (non-potable) water source, reducing your use of drinking water for exterior uses, thereby reducing water costs.
- ▮ On-site stormwater storage contributes to water conservation and may reduce water utility costs.
- ▮ Collects water that may be used even during a drought or during time of imposed water use restrictions.
- ▮ Reduces transport of pollutants from impervious surfaces to waterways.
- ▮ Reduces surges of stormwater to local streams, minimizing flash flooding, improving fish habitat and reducing water pollution.

How can you determine if your property is suitable for a cistern?

A cistern is a good option for homes and buildings with:

- ▮ Relatively large roof surfaces and the ability to divert multiple downspouts into one cistern.
- ▮ Downspouts that discharge onto driveways, other paved surfaces, or steep slopes.
- ▮ Gardens or other landscape features that require frequent watering.

Assess your property while it is raining to see how and where your downspouts discharge water. To catch rainwater from a single downspout draining a relatively small roof area, rain barrels may be a more appropriate option. Other considerations are the proximity to trees and finding level ground for installation (for above-ground systems). Grading or installation of a concrete pad may be needed. Cisterns should be placed at least 10 feet from an existing tree to avoid damage to the tree.

Qualifying for a Rebate

Project	Individual Residence OR Individual Members of a Housing Cooperative	Commercial, Multi-Family Dwelling, Nonprofit, Not-for-Profit Organizations, Housing Cooperatives
Cisterns	\$500 maximum (\$1 per gallon stored, 250 gallons minimum)	\$2,000 maximum (\$1 per gallon stored, 250 gallons minimum)

What are the costs?

- ▮ Several hundred dollars to several thousand dollars, depending on the size, type, and design.

Can you do this project yourself?

Small cisterns are suitable as a do-it-yourself project and can be purchased online or at home improvement stores. Larger, more complex cisterns may require electricity for pumping, grading, excavation, or other construction activities and may require professional installation.

