



# Rainwater Cistern Maintenance Guide



Congratulations on your rainwater cistern! This practice is part of a community-wide effort to manage stormwater in a way that protects and conserves our water resources. With routine maintenance, rainwater harvesting systems like your cistern should provide a sustainable nonpotable water supply for years to come!

We've provided this handy maintenance guide to help you get started.

More detailed information about rainwater harvesting and cistern maintenance is available from:

Be CreekSmart™ | [CreekSmart.org](http://CreekSmart.org)

City of Durham - Rain Catchers | [bit.ly/RainCatchers](http://bit.ly/RainCatchers)

NC Cooperative Extension | [www.bae.ncsu.edu/topic/waterharvesting](http://www.bae.ncsu.edu/topic/waterharvesting) and [www.ces.ncsu.edu/depts/agecon/WECO/documents/WaterHarvestHome2008.pdf](http://www.ces.ncsu.edu/depts/agecon/WECO/documents/WaterHarvestHome2008.pdf)

Maintenance Schedule	Winter	Spring	Summer	Fall
Use the Water	Drain or use the water between rain events!			
Clean the Gutters				After leaves drop in Fall
Clean the Screen	As needed - whenever debris builds up			
Rinse the Tank				After leaves drop in Fall
Winterize the Cistern				After leaves drop in Fall

### *Use the Water!*

The water from your cistern may be used for watering lawns and gardens, washing cars, etc. It is important to use the water between rain events. If it stays full, it will not provide any water quality benefits. If you can't use it, drain it.

### *Slow Drip*

With Slow Drip the tank will drain within 2 to 3 days and your cistern will be ready for the next rainfall. You can setup the cistern for Slow Drip by attaching a hose to the spigot located at the bottom. Run the hose to a spot where the water can safely drain. Open the handle so that water SLOWLY drips out. Slow Drip helps to ensure that the cistern is providing water quality benefits by capturing rainfall from smaller rain events.

### *Clean the Gutters*

Clear leaves, debris, and dirt that built up in the gutters and pipes flowing to the cistern. After the leaves drop in Fall is a good time to do this. You may need to do it more frequently if you have overhanging trees. Check to make sure gutters are working properly at least once per year and after intense rainfall to ensure that there is no damage.

### *Clean the Screen*

Clear leaves, sticks, and other debris that collects on the screen lid four times per year (weekly during fall leaf season). Once a month check the screen for damage and repair as needed.



# Cistern Maintenance Guide

Be CreekSmart™ | Visit [CreekSmart.org](http://CreekSmart.org) for more info!



## *Rinse the Tank*

Once a year, after the leaves drop in Fall, tip over the cistern tank and rinse it out with a hose. The screen will catch larger items but smaller material such as dirt, sand, and silt, will build up inside the cistern tank. You can rinse the tank more frequently or at other times of the year, but combining this task with other maintenance tasks may be more convenient.

## *Winterize the Cistern*

Setup the cistern for Slow Drip to ensure that the tank and spigots drain between rain events. With proper maintenance, your cistern should withstand typical Durham winter conditions without problems. The occasional extreme cold weather we experience in our region may crack spigot fittings or hoses. If you experience a problem with a cracked part, first check to see if it is still under warranty (usually 1 year from purchase). The company name of your cistern is written on the tank. Local hardware supply stores should have what you need to make basic repairs but check with the cistern company for a parts list before you go.

## *Water Quality Considerations*

If algae, mosquitos, or odors become a concern, add a capful of chlorine bleach. This is about 1 ounce, or 2 tablespoons. The small amount will not harm plants (but vinegar will). Expect that some algae will naturally grow due to nutrients in rain water. In most cases, no maintenance is required. Just enjoy the excess nutrients that are available to your garden!

### **LOCAL SOURCES FOR CISTERN INFORMATION AND SUPPLIES**

Here are some local sources for hardware and parts:

*Southern States – Carrboro, Creedmoor, Mebane* ([www.southernstates.com](http://www.southernstates.com))

Good selection of water harvesting parts with several locations in the Triangle.

*Lowe's and Home Depot – Several locations in the Triangle* ([lowes.com](http://lowes.com) | [homedepot.com](http://homedepot.com))

Selection and knowledge of cisterns can vary across locations. It is helpful to know specifically what you need since staff may have little experience with rainwater harvesting.

Other possible sources for parts:

Stone Bros

Durham Garden Center

Agri supply in Hillsborough

Agri supply in Garner