



# Cisterns

**A cistern** is a large tank that collects rain water from your roof. Cisterns are most appropriate when there are significant outdoor water needs. They can be above ground, connected to a downspout, or buried under ground. The rain water can be used for many activities including:

- Watering plants (gardens, lawn)
- Washing your car
- Washing the dog
- Flushing toilets (requires additional permits and plumbing)

**The benefits** of a cistern include:

- Savings on your water bill by using rain water instead of drinking water for irrigation.
- Relief from drainage problems and basement flooding issues by collecting and containing much of the roof runoff.
- A reduction in stormwater runoff from your property, which reduces the amount of sediment and other pollutants that would be washed away with the runoff into nearby storm drains and local streams.
- Groundwater recharge. The slow release of the water allows it to soak into the ground, which supplies water to local streams in between storms.

Cisterns come in a variety of sizes. Select a cistern based on an estimate of how much runoff is generated by your home and how much water you can reuse on your property. Most cistern systems include a pump to provide sufficient water pressure to use the water. It is best to regularly use the water in your cistern to keep the system operating well and ensure there is capacity to store water from the next rain storm. Locate the cistern in a shady or protected location to deter algae growth in the tank. Darker colored tanks also help prevent algae growth. It is recommended to disconnect and drain the tank prior to the first winter freeze.



The Langston-Brown Community Center cistern (top) can hold 11,000 gallons of water.

This cistern at the County Trades Center (bottom) can hold 2,000 gallons of water.

Top banner: Cisterns come in a variety of shapes and sizes.

**Learn more** about cisterns at  
[www.bae.ncsu.edu/stormwater/PublicationFiles/  
WaterHarvestHome2008.pdf](http://www.bae.ncsu.edu/stormwater/PublicationFiles/WaterHarvestHome2008.pdf)

**Arlington's StormwaterWise Landscapes Program**  
[www.arlingtonva.us/stormwaterwise](http://www.arlingtonva.us/stormwaterwise)



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