FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

RAIN BARREL AND CISTERN REBATE

How do I determine what size cistern or number of barrels I need?
The size of your system depends on a number of factors, including the size of your roof, the storage capacity of your rain barrel or cistern, and how you intend to use the water. A rough rule of thumb is that you can collect 600 gallons of water for every 1,000 square feet of roof area for every inch of rain.

How much water can I save using rainwater?
Water savings vary depending on the size of your rainwater harvesting system, rainfall patterns, how you use the rainwater, and the size of your garden.

What happens when my rain storage tank overflows?
Overflow water should be directed to a drain or suitable rain garden that can absorb water onsite at an appropriate rate. Overflow must be directed away from your home or neighboring properties.

Do I need a permit?
Check with your local building department to determine permitting requirements. Local requirements are sometimes more strict than statewide ones. California rules state that a permit is not needed if your rain barrel or cistern meets the following requirements:

- Cistern capacity is less than 5,000 gallons
- Height to width ratio is less than 2-to-1
- Captured rainwater is only used for non-spray irrigation
- Cistern is supported directly on grade
- Rainwater system does not require power or a makeup water supply connection

What is a first-flush diverter?
It’s a device that diverts the season’s first, most polluted flow of rainwater away from your rain barrel. You should install a first-flush diverter if you intend to water edibles with your rainwater.

How much maintenance is required for a rainwater harvesting system?
Rain barrels and cisterns should be inspected and cleaned seasonally. Before and after the rainy season, clean out roof gutters, screens, overflow outlets and filters. Once a year, flush out any debris or buildup that may have accumulated on the bottom of the cistern. Repair leaks immediately.

Where can I get more information about code requirements for installing a rainwater harvesting system?
Additional resources
American Rainwater Catchment Systems Association: www.arcsa.org
Greywater Action: www.greywateraction.org
Rainwater Harvesting for Drylands and Beyond: www.harvestingrainwater.com