



## 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?

Full code requirements can be found in Chapter 16 of the 2019 California Plumbing Code.  
<http://epubs.iapmo.org/2019/CPC/#p=371>

## Additional resources

American Rainwater Catchment Systems Association: [www.arcsa.org](http://www.arcsa.org)

Greywater Action: [www.greywateraction.org](http://www.greywateraction.org)

Rainwater Harvesting for Drylands and Beyond: [www.harvestingrainwater.com](http://www.harvestingrainwater.com)

San Francisco Power and Water Rainwater Harvesting Guidebook:  
[www.sfwater.org/Modules/ShowDocument.aspx?documentID=8897](http://www.sfwater.org/Modules/ShowDocument.aspx?documentID=8897)