

Cisterns: An Important RainWise Solution

RainWise, a City of Seattle and King County partnership, offers rebates for rain gardens and cisterns on private property. These installations capture water that falls on roofs and keeps it out of sewer pipes during big rain storms. Over 1,000 property owners have installed RainWise rain gardens and cisterns and are helping to keep our waterways clean.

Rain gardens require specific property conditions to work. When a property is too steep, too small, or has insufficient drainage for a rain garden, cisterns can be a great solution.

What is a RainWise cistern?

A cistern is a large above-ground container used to collect roof water. It can hold 200 to more than 1,000 gallons of water. Cisterns are available in a variety of shapes, including round tanks and "slimline" versions that are about 25 inches wide. Most cisterns are made of durable polyethylene and are available in a variety of colors, but they can also be made from stainless steel and other materials.

Cisterns are used around the world to collect rain, but RainWise cisterns also help reduce combined sewer overflows. They are equipped with a low-flow valve to let the collected water slowly trickle back into the sewer system. This valve is opened at the beginning of the rainy season to ensure the cistern empties after each storm and is ready to fill up again with more rain. Around May, the valve can be closed to capture, store, and use rain for summer watering.



Not all properties are appropriate for rain gardens. Cisterns are a great solution!



Slimline cistern

I want to put in one or more cisterns. What's next?

1. **Check your eligibility** at www.700milliongallons.org/rainwise/eligibility-map/
Type in your address to find out if you are eligible for a rebate and what you are eligible for (rain garden and/or cistern).
2. **Choose your contractor** from the "Find Contractors" section of the website or attend an event to meet contractors.
3. **Your contractor will help you answer the following** for your property:
 - amount of roof area you can capture
 - cistern options and placement
 - design and installation schedule
 - total project cost, rebate amount, and rebate process.
4. If you decide to move ahead on your project, the contractor **will schedule a pre-inspection and do the installation.**
5. **After construction is complete, your contractor will schedule a final inspection.** A RainWise inspector will confirm that your installation was done properly.
6. **Get your rebate!** Submit your rebate package and receive your rebate within 6-8 weeks.
7. **Maintain your cistern** for at least five years. Your contractor will walk you through the easy maintenance steps.



Cisterns can be single or connected together

A typical cistern project includes

- the cistern and associated plumbing, including the low-flow valve
- a secure base (concrete, or layer of sand, gravel, pavers)
- possible changes to gutters and downspouts so rain drains to the cisterns
- installation of an overflow connection so when the tanks fill up during big storms, they can safely overflow to the sewer system or a rain garden.



A number of large buildings have done RainWise installations. The Alnoor Mosque congregation (above) chose the slimline option to fit a narrow space. At the United Methodist Church (left) three large cisterns capture ALL the water that falls on its roof and provides summer water for its gardens.

RainWise will help pay for cisterns!

How much is the rebate?

The average RainWise rebate is \$4,200.

RainWise rebates for cisterns vary based on the square feet of roof area captured and the size of the cistern (the range is between \$1.75 and \$3.43 per square foot). Cistern rebates typically cover between 50 and 100 percent of the total cost of the project. A minimum of 400 square feet of roof area must be captured to qualify for a rebate. Installations can include one cistern, multiple cisterns connected together in one location, or multiple cisterns in various locations.



Cisterns are available in a variety of shapes, sizes and colors to fit your property.



Photos courtesy of Rain Dog Designs

Cisterns are easy to maintain

Cistern maintenance is relatively easy. A screen inside the cistern helps to trap large items, such as leaves. In autumn, it is necessary to clean the screen and flush out any sediment that may have settled in the cistern. It is also important to avoid a clogged cistern by clearing your gutters of leaves and debris.

The low-flow valve needs to be opened in September to allow for the slow release of water throughout the rainy season. This valve can be closed again in late spring to store rain for summer watering.

A maintenance guide is provided with each cistern installation, and your RainWise contractor will demonstrate how to care for the system. For more information visit

www.700milliongallons.org/rainwise/maintenance/.



Extras

The RainWise rebate covers most (if not all) of the costs of the cistern installation. Some customers also choose to add features not included in the RainWise rebate.

Pumps: Many cistern customers are interested in pumps to make summer watering easier. Many options are available (including solar-powered ones). Talk to your contractor about details.

Aesthetic options – art, disguise or fencing: There are numerous ways to incorporate a cistern into your property, depending on your aesthetic preferences. Some customers choose to stash their cistern(s) behind a screen, shrubs, or tuck it next to a wall along a walkway. Fence panels or screens can be included in the rebate, but there are usually some out-of-pocket expenses. Talk to your contractor about your options.



Some customers are interested in pumps to assist with summer watering.

Photo courtesy of Rain Dog Designs



Photo courtesy of Rain Dog Designs



Have questions?
Need more information?
Visit www.rainwise.seattle.gov.
Email us at rainwise@seattle.gov or
call the Garden Hotline at **206-633-0224**

Alternative formats available.
206-633-0224 or TTY Relay: 711

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