

Manage your rain water at home

# Rain Garden and Cistern Maintenance Guide

Thank you for maintaining your rain garden and cistern to protect our waterways.



*RainWise, a City of Seattle and King County partnership, offers rebates for cisterns and rain gardens on private property. Learn more at [www.rainwise.seattle.gov](http://www.rainwise.seattle.gov).*



# Rain Garden

## Weed:

Weeds can choke young plants and spread quickly. Pull weeds by hand or with a long-handled weed puller. Weed as necessary year-round, especially in late winter, spring, and early fall when the soil is still moist. **Pull the entire weed—roots and all**—so that it doesn't immediately grow back. **Never use herbicides/pesticides** in your rain garden.

## Mulch:

Mulch (such as compost, leaves and wood chips) prevents weeds, conserves water and protects roots. **Check and maintain a mulch layer to a depth of 3 inches as necessary.** The best mulch in a rain garden is arborist wood chips, available free from tree services. Look for any areas of exposed soil and cover them with mulch when needed. Be careful to avoid piling mulch up against plant stems.

## Water:

Young plants need water to grow strong roots. **Watering is important during the first two to three summers** after your rain garden has been installed. In general, water when the weather is dry and warm, from May through September. Watering before 8 am is best to reduce evaporation.

*Be sure to water deeply, moistening the top 6-12 inches of soil.* After watering, wait an hour, then dig down to see if the water has gone deep enough.

You can use a watering wand or save time by laying out a soaker hose next to your plants and covering it with mulch. Learn more about how to water new plants and how to use a soaker hose at [www.seattle.gov/util/environmentconservation/mylawngarden/smart\\_watering](http://www.seattle.gov/util/environmentconservation/mylawngarden/smart_watering).

Age of Garden	Watering Frequency
1st year	Every 3-4 days
2nd year	Once every 2 weeks
3rd year	Once a month or more frequently depending on whether the leaves are showing stress (excessive wilting, browning)

## Plant:

If you need to remove dead or dying plants, **replace them in the fall.** This will give the plants time to grow more roots *before the dry season.* More extensive roots help plants fight off disease, dry summers, and cold winters.

## Clean:

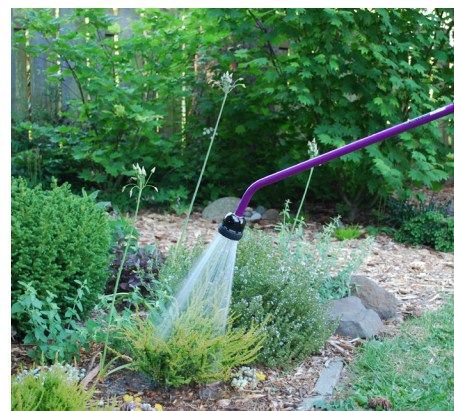
Trash and debris can block inlets and outlets. **Clean any sediment, debris, or trash from inside your rain garden regularly.** Check the flow when rains start in fall and again in winter.



**Weed:** Remove entire weed, including roots.



**Mulch:** Put mulch, such as woodchips, on the soil's surface.



**Water:** Water deeply.



**Plant:** Fall is the best time to replace plants.



# Weeds to Remove

View a complete guide of common weeds at [www.portlandoregon.gov/bes/article/471991](http://www.portlandoregon.gov/bes/article/471991)



## Himalayan Blackberry

Vine with thorns and black summer fruit.



## Dandelion

Long, deep roots.



## Bindweed (Morning glory)

White flowers in spring to summer.



## Buttercup

Shiny yellow flowers. Spreads aggressively in moist areas.



## English Ivy

Vine with fast growth.



## Common Vetch

Lots of seeds in pods after flowering.



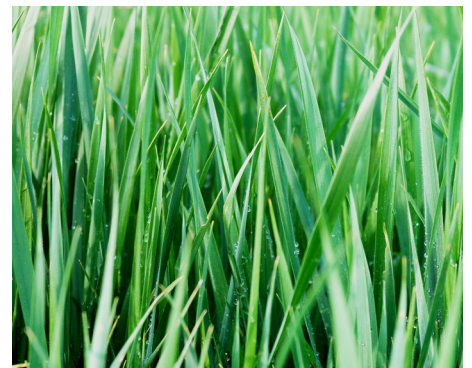
## Herb Robert (Stinky Bob)

Smelly weed with long, extensive roots.



## Bittercress / Shotweed

Seeds pop off at slightest touch.



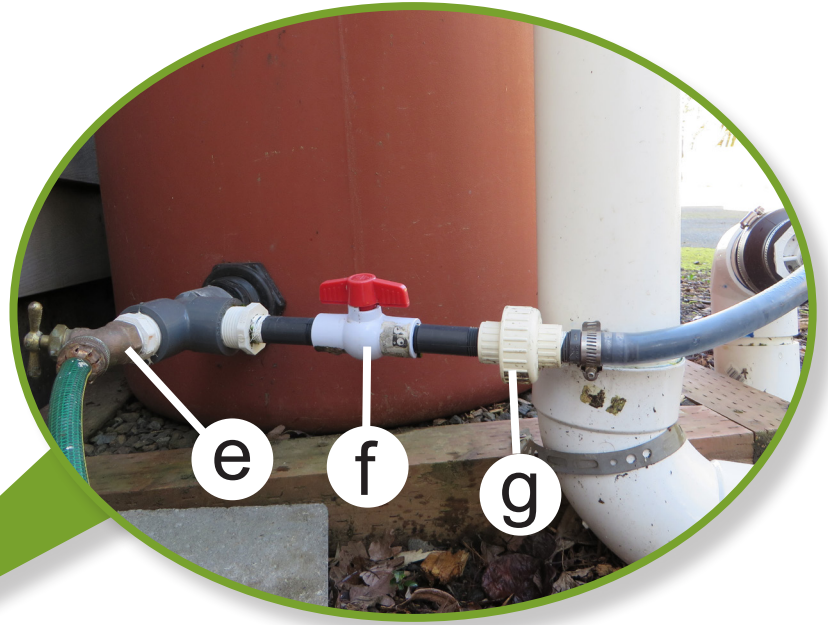
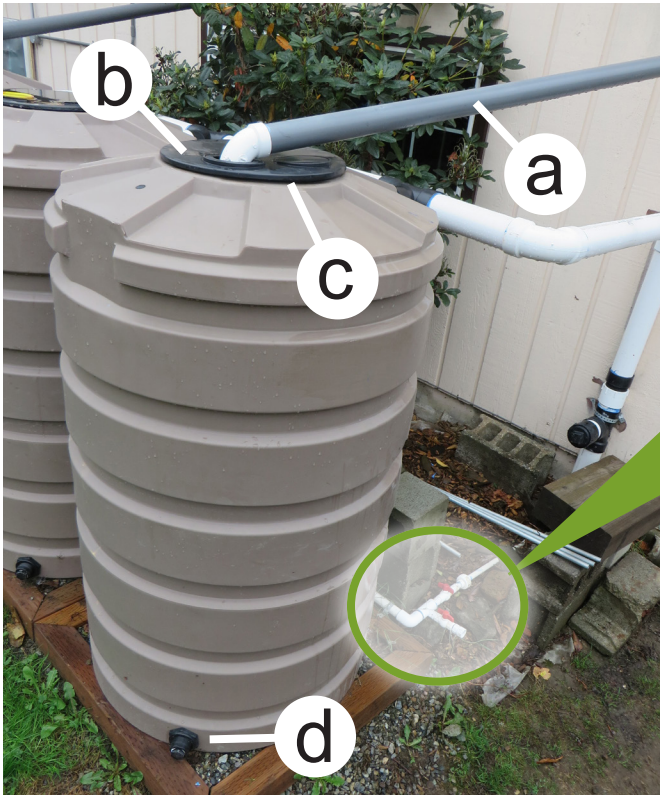
## Grass

Grass from surrounding lawn can spread into your garden and become the worst weed.



# Cistern

## Understand your cistern:



- |                       |                              |
|-----------------------|------------------------------|
| a. Downspout          | e. Spigot                    |
| b. Lid                | f. Low-flow orifice valve    |
| c. Screen (under lid) | g. Orifice housing           |
| d. Cleanout           | h. Orifice (see photo below) |

## Before the autumn rains start...

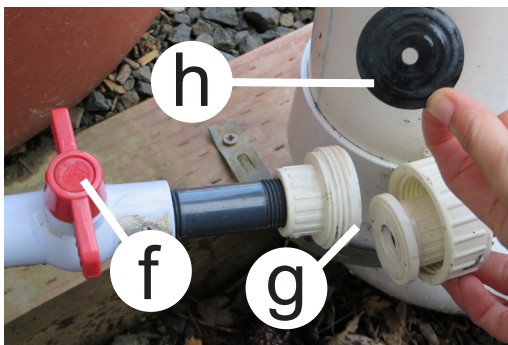
Before the rainy autumn months, prepare your cistern to allow water to flow freely through your cistern to a rain garden or side sewer. Later, in spring, you can use your cistern to capture and retain rainwater to use when watering your garden.

## August: Clean your cistern

When your cistern is almost empty, check inside to see if you need to remove any sediment or algae.

1. Open the bottom cleanout (**d**) to release water and dirt.
2. Move the downspout (**a**) away from the cistern lid (**b**).
3. Take off the lid (**b**) and the screen (**c**) so that you have access to the inside of the cistern.
4. Spray water down inside the cistern to clean out the debris.
5. Replace everything so that the cistern is ready for the rainy season.

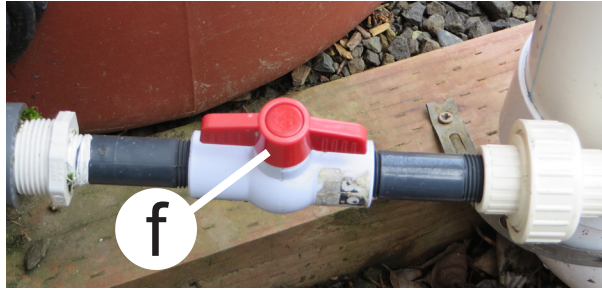
## August–September: Clear any blockages



1. Close the valve (**f**) to hold back any water.
2. Unscrew the white plastic orifice housing (**g**).
3. Remove the orifice (**h**)—washer between the plastic orifice housing.
4. Clean the orifice and make sure you can see through the hole (this means water can flow out).
5. Put the orifice back in place, reconnect the housing and open the valve to let the water flow again.

## September: Open the low-flow valve

Let rain flow slowly into your garden or side sewer by opening the valve **(f)** to the low-flow orifice.

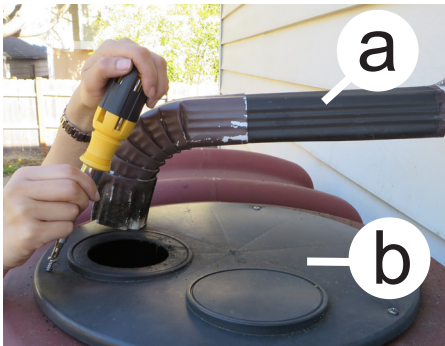


(Turn the valve parallel to the pipe.)

## September–May: Clean your gutters and check your cistern

Leaves that fall onto your roof will collect in your gutters and get stuck in your cistern screen. Be sure to check your gutters and cistern at least once a year.

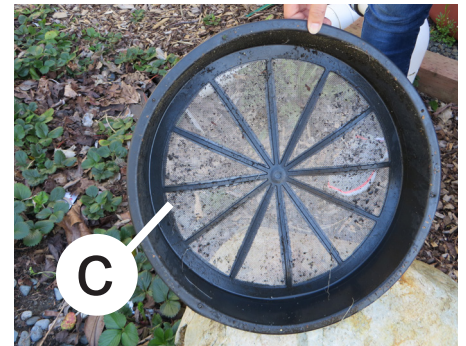
1. Move downspout **(a)** away from hole in lid **(b)**.
2. Unscrew and remove cistern lid so that you can see the screen **(c)** underneath.
3. Remove any leaves or other debris from the screen.
4. Scrape or spray off any dirt, then put the screen back into the cistern.
5. Put the lid, screws, and downspout back into place.



Steps 1–2



Step 3

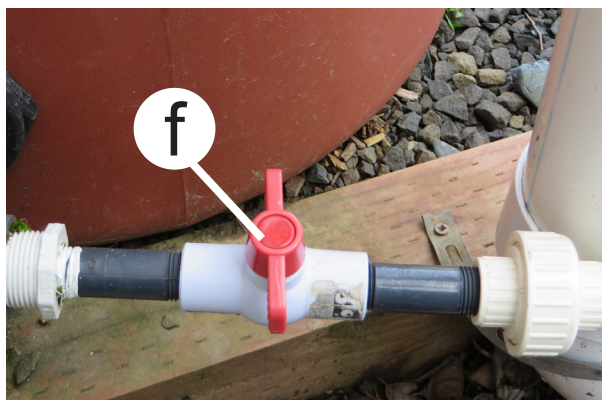


Step 4

## Entering the dry season...

### May: Close the low-flow valve

Close the valve **(f)** to the low-flow orifice in May to save water for the dry season.



### May–August: Use cistern water

Connect a hose to the spigot **(e)** to use the water you have saved in your cistern.





# Gutters

## Please keep your gutters clean year round.

Leaves, dirt, and so much more land on your roof all year long. If you have a composite roof, the grit on the shingles may slowly come off, making its way into your gutters. Eventually, all this debris collects in your gutters until rain washes it down your downspouts. Without knowing it, you may have a clogged cistern.



Please clean your gutters at least once a year to keep the rainwater flowing.

## Questions?

- Need help identifying if a plant in your garden is a weed?
- Not sure where to find arborists' wood chips for fresh mulch?
- Wondering how often or how long to water your new rain garden?

Contact the Garden Hotline at:

206-633-0224 or [help@gardenhotline.org](mailto:help@gardenhotline.org)

*Multi-lingual service is provided.*



## Maintain your installation for at least 5 years

Seattle Public Utilities and King County are counting on your RainWise project to control polluted stormwater. Your rain garden and/or cistern was made possible with public funds. And, in return, your continued maintenance will help protect Puget Sound, Lake Washington and our city's creeks.

## Let us know if you sell your property

Remember to contact Seattle Public Utilities or King County at 206-684-0100 or [rainwise@seattle.gov](mailto:rainwise@seattle.gov) if you intend to sell your home. Your RainWise project must be listed in your Seller's Disclosure Form to let the next owner know about your cistern and/or rain garden.

**For more information, please visit: [www.rainwise.seattle.gov](http://www.rainwise.seattle.gov)**

