

How to Clean Concrete Cisterns

By Claudia Henning

For thousands of years cisterns have provided a dependable method of collecting rainwater for future use. They are still in use today to help water gardens, trees, shrubs and lawns on land that is relatively water-deprived.



A cistern is essential on properties with limited water resources.

Things You Will Need

+

- Safety glasses
- Gloves
- Water barrier boots
- Chlorine bleach
- Garden hose with spray nozzle
- Ladder
- Long-handled scrub brush

Concrete cisterns, which typically deliver water via a pump system, need to be drained, scrubbed and flushed annually to deter mold, algae and bacteria. A full cleaning should include all grates, pipes and hoses in the cistern.

Draining

1. Attach a drain hose to the cistern tank and direct the other end to an area that will not be harmed by a large release of water. Close any valves carrying water to the house. Open the drain valve by twisting the handle to the "Open" position.
2. Manually turn the electric pump to the "On" position and drain the tank completely. Turn it to "Off" once the tank is empty.
3. Close the drain valve by twisting the lever to the "Close" position. Open the lid to the cistern tank to make sure it has emptied.

Scrubbing & Flushing

1. Locate the collection grating, normally located a few feet uphill of the actual tank. Pour 3 to 4 cups of chlorine bleach into the grating. Follow it with about 20 gallons of water from the garden hose. The bleach water will clean and disinfect as it moves down to the cistern tank.
2. Place a ladder down into the open tank and take the long-handled scrub brush down into the tank. Wear safety glasses and gloves to scrub the ceiling, walls and floor of the cistern.
3. Climb out and pull the ladder up and out of the tank. Close the lid and move the drain valve to "Open" and start the electric pump. Shut the pump off and close drain valve once the tank has emptied.
4. Place the water hose over the collection grate and proceed to fill the cistern. This could take a while, depending on the size of the tank.
5. Open the drain valve and turn on the pump to drain the tank after it fills all the way. Close the drain valve and wipe down all of the gratings with bleach water.

Tip

Consider adding mosquito protective coverings, if they are not already installed.

Warning

Have someone outside the tank monitor as you clean the cistern inside. They can be of immediate assistance if you are overcome by bleach fumes or there is a lack of oxygen in the tank.

Open the cover of the tank and keep it off for an hour or two before attempting the project. This will help equalize the oxygen levels in and out of the tank.