

Maintaining your rainwater system

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Maintenance for non-potable supply

Even if your water is not being used for drinking, regular maintenance is important to keep the supply clean. It will save time and frustration in the long run.

It should include:

- keeping the roof clear of overhanging vegetation, particularly before the autumn leaf-fall
- regularly checking the roof and spouting for debris, especially before and after a storm
- when cleaning roof and spouting, ensuring the wash water doesn't go into the tank
- regularly checking and maintaining screens and filters
- washing out first-flush diverters every three or four months – this only takes 10 minutes
- checking the condition of pipes, fittings and structural supports.

It's also a good idea to drain and clean your tank every so often. How often depends on what gets into your tank, and on how often you remove sludge and sediment. Every five years for optimal situations, or more often if you get sludge building up.

Maintenance for whole-of-house supply

If you use rainwater for whole-of house use, regular maintenance is vital for health, even if you have sterilisation equipment. Maintenance will save costs and time, and prevent bad odours, tastes, and frustration in the long run. First-flush diverters seriously reduce bacterial contamination: do include them in the system.

Maintenance should include:

- the same maintenance as for non-potable supply (above), and
- servicing sterilisation equipment as recommended by the supplier
- regularly checking for sludge build-up in the tank

Dealing with the leaf problem

It's difficult to totally eliminate the problem of leaves, especially with trees overhanging the roof, but you can significantly reduce the effects. Apart from pruning where possible, the best strategy is to install screening at the earliest possible point or points in the collection chain and then, if necessary, deal with the small amount which inevitably gets through.

The first step is to keep them out:

1. Install a screen product over the gutter to prevent most of the leaflets entering -- though most effective for larger leaves, you will still catch most of the small culprits.
2. Install a leaf-diversion device at each downpipe -- this will catch most of it but will need regular cleaning.
3. Install first-flush diversion, either at each downpipe or at the tank -- this will remove the most contaminated water at the start of each rain event.

The second step, if necessary, is to deal with the fine material that will inevitably get through:

1. Take the water from the top of the tank instead of the bottom -- this water will have less suspended material.
2. Take the tank overflow from the bottom instead of the top -- this will help flush out the sediment at the bottom.
3. Regularly (say every two or three years) clean the tank.

For more information:

- See Fact sheets on
 - Rainwater systems
 - Rainwater treatment
 - Using less water
- Visit the Smarter Homes website www.smarterhomes.org.nz/water/collecting-and-using-rainwater/