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Making A Cistern

This 70 year old cistern is still in use today. Made completely of concrete including it's cap, it's tank is 8 feet deep and has an inner diameter of 10 feet with a capacity of 4,700 gallons.

How one family did it...

As told by Glenn Adamson (born 1917)
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Modern cisterns are made out of concrete and are usually underground. In the early days many people didn't have the money to make an all-concrete cistern and did it this way:

When I was a kid on the old homestead our cistern was about 25 feet straight out the front door of our house. It was a big hole about 8 feet in diameter and maybe ten feet deep in the ground. A cement floor had been put in it but the walls were dirt. Dad knew a lot about plastering because of his carpentry work. He quickly plastered the dirt walls with several coats of plaster. This made it water tight. The cistern's vertical, round wall was capped with a cement lid (a wooden top would also work in a pinch). In the top of the lid was a 2 1/2 foot square cover. At first we lowered the bucket on a rope to get the water, but later Dad put a well pump on top of it so we didn't have to open it and let dirt fall in. From the cistern we got all the water we needed for cooking, washing, and whatever. When the cistern got low, Dad diverted water from the ditch to fill the cistern. The water was fairly clear as it had just run out of a pond. After the cistern was full, Dad treated the water, probably with chlorine. We only put water in the cistern about twice a year.



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Al Durtschi, E-mail: mark@waltonfeed.com

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