



context.

Some green cemeteries are a specially-designated section

within a conventional cemetery. In other cases, it is an expansive tract of land, often contiguous with an existing park, critical habitat area or forever-wild conservation area.

Green burial sites usually exclude embalmed remains and burial vaults; some exclude cremated remains as well as cremation uses a large amount of energy and releases mercury, dioxins, and other chemicals into the atmosphere. Shrouds or caskets made of natural, biodegradable, non-toxic materials are often specified. The grave typically can be marked only by a natural rock, native plant or plaque flush with the ground. To preserve the pristine natural landscape and protect native plants and wildlife, most green cemeteries will forbid or limit personal plantings and many memorial decorations like flowers, wreaths, flags, chimes, balloons, and toys. Be sure to inquire about the cemetery's special restrictions when buying a plot.

If you or your family members own rural property, home burial may be an option. Most states do not prohibit burial on private property, but each municipality has its own zoning requirements, so be sure to check and

get the required permits.

### No Green Cemetery Nearby?

You can modify a simple burial to make it as green as possible by not embalming and using a shroud or a biodegradable wood or cardboard casket. Try to find a cemetery that doesn't require a vault, but if you must, ask that the lid be discarded and the box flipped over so that the body can return to the earth.

### For More Information:

Green Burial Council  
[www.greenburialcouncil.org](http://www.greenburialcouncil.org)

The Centre for Natural Burial  
[naturalburial.coop](http://naturalburial.coop)

*Grave Matters: A Journey Through the Modern Funeral Industry to a Natural Way of Burial*, Mark Harris (Scribner 08)

Thank you to Marcy Klein of the FCA of Greater Rochester for the original text.



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## Green Burial

### Environmentally Friendly Burial



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Protecting a consumer's right to choose meaningful, dignified, and affordable funerals since 1963.

## What is Green Burial?

Green (or natural) burial is an alternative burial practice that emphasizes simplicity and environmental sustainability. The body is neither cremated nor prepared with chemicals such as embalming fluids. It is simply placed in a biodegradable coffin or shroud and interred without a concrete burial vault. The gravesite is allowed to return to nature. The goal is complete decomposition of the body and its natural return to the soil. Only then can a burial truly be “ashes to ashes, dust to dust,” a phrase so often used when we bury our dead.

## Why Choose Green Burial?

Green burials are not new; most burials before the mid-19th century were conducted this way. But they are enjoying a resurgence in popularity today. Some reasons why people choose a green burial include:

**Lower cost.** Because green burials do not involve embalming, fancy caskets, or concrete vaults, they can be a very cost-effective alternative to traditional burials, lowering the cost by thousands of dollars. If the family supplies their own shroud or coffin, the cost can be further reduced.

**Conserving natural resources.** Each year US cemeteries bury over 30 million board feet of hardwood and 90,000 tons of steel in caskets, 17,000 tons of steel and copper in vaults, and 1.6 million tons of reinforced concrete in vaults. With green burial, fewer precious resources are wasted – resources that could be put to better use.

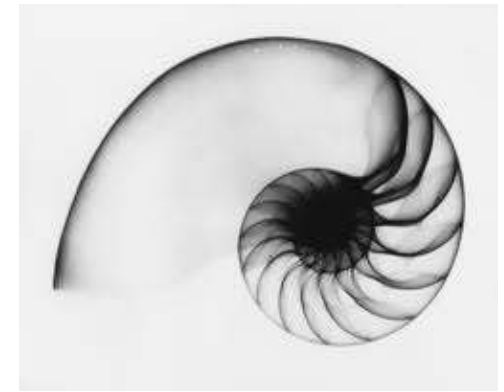
**Protecting the environment.** During the embalming process, toxic fluids are released into the sewer system, and the health of funeral professionals is endangered by repeated exposure to the carcinogens in embalming fluids.

**Preserving natural areas.** Love of nature and a desire for “eternal rest” in a forever wild meadow or forest are frequently cited reasons to choose green burial. Green burial sites restore or preserve a natural landscape populated by native trees, shrubs and wildflowers; the sites offer food and refuge to birds and other wildlife. Graves are hand dug and marked with fieldstones, GPS chips, native plants and other subtle markers. Green cemeteries are not watered, trimmed, or fertilized, and no pesticides or herbicides are used, saving labor and resources. A green cemetery can be an important component in the acquisition and conservation of native habitats and resources.

## Choosing a Funeral Director

As green burial increases in popularity, more and more funeral directors are willing to offer it as an option. Some already include this choice on their General Price Lists. However, the Federal Trade Commission, which regulates many aspects of the funeral industry, has not yet developed guidelines or standards for funeral homes or cemeteries offering green burials.

The nonprofit Green Burial Council offers certification to providers who meet certain standards. These providers are supposed to publish and define their green burial offerings, such as washing, preserving and restoring the body with



biodegradable and non-toxic chemicals, and are rated on their compliance with other optional criteria, such as taking special training, carrying GBC approved containers and offering viewings without embalming. However, limited resources make it difficult, at present, for the GBC to monitor their approved providers for continued compliance.

The National Funeral Directors Association offers its members a Green Funeral Practices Certificate, which recognizes that the funeral home has adopted environmentally responsible practices and offers environmentally friendly products and services to consumers. But be aware that the certified provider is a member of the organization awarding the certification and has not necessarily been evaluated or approved by any independent organization.

## Choosing a Cemetery

The first green cemetery opened in the US in 1998; about twenty operate today, with more being planned. “Green burial” and “natural burial” are often used interchangeably in this