

2015 Green/Natural Burial Survey



FAQs

What Is Green/Natural Burial?

Green/Natural burial is burial of a dead human body in the soil in a manner that allows the body to decompose naturally. Green/Natural Burial is burial as it was practiced by most human cultures for most of human history, until the widespread use of commercial funeral products in the late 19th century

How does Green/Natural Burial differ from conventional burial?

- The body is unembalmed (or embalmed using formaldehyde-free fluids).
- The body is buried directly in the earth in a casket or covering, such as a shroud, made of non-toxic and biodegradable material. No metal caskets are used.
- A burial vault or liner is not used.
- Typically, there is minimal use of a funeral home's services, if at all.
- In many cases, family members and friends may participate more directly and intimately in the burial.

What are the benefits of Green/Natural Burial?

- Simplicity.

- Lower cost.
- Conservation of natural resources and reduction of carbon emissions.
- Opportunities for family and friends to be more “hands on” in caring for their dead.

In what ways do family members and friends participate more directly in Green/Natural Burial?

Prior to burial, they may wash, clothe, and casket the body; transport the body from the place of death to the cemetery (or before the cemetery, to a church or other place where a ceremony is held); assist in lowering the body into the grave; assist in covering the grave with earth.

How do Minnesota laws support Green/Natural Burial?

Minnesota law never required embalming, a casket, or a vault for in-ground burial in a cemetery. However, almost all cemeteries require a casket and vault.

In 2010, the Minnesota legislature amended Minnesota Statutes (**149A: Mortuary Science; Disposition of Dead Bodies**) to allow families greater control of a loved one’s body after death. Families may now:

- Preserve the body in the home up to four days using dry ice.
- Obtain both a burial permit and a permit to transport the body.
- Transport the body to the cemetery.

How does the cost of Green/Natural Burial compare with so-called “conventional” burial?

The short answer is, “usually less.” Our **Green/Natural Burial Survey** presents the range of prices for a burial lot, opening and closing costs, and additional maintenance charges, if any. The total cost is usually less since there is no embalming, no burial vault or burial liner, and less need (if any) for the services of a funeral firm, such as transporting the body to the cemetery.

Not surprisingly, costly biodegradable “green” burial products have come on the market, and one can spend several thousand dollars for an “earth-friendly” casket, and several hundred dollars for a trendy hand-made shroud. **Neither is required or necessary.** As we like to say, the amount you spend does not equal the amount you love.

Is a casket or shroud required for burial?

The short answer is “no.” The usual practice is for the body to be covered in some way

before burial. "Covered" may mean in a plain pine casket or coffin, in an alternative cardboard container usually used for cremation, or wrapped in a shroud. The shroud may be purpose-made and marketed as such, or something from home, such as a blanket, or quilt, or other fabric.

How is the body lowered into the grave?

Family and friends may take part in lowering the body into the ground, whether the body is in a casket, or wrapped in a shroud or blanket, with or without a burial trundle.

Two slide shows on our [Green Burial](#) page depict both practices.

Is a Green/Natural Burial grave as deep as a conventional grave?

Graves are typically shallower (4 1/2 feet) in dedicated green cemeteries, such as Prairie Oaks Memorial Eco Gardens.

Depth of grave for natural burial at Mound Cemetery (5 - 6 feet) and Roselawn Cemetery (5 1/2 - 6 feet) approximate the grave depth of a conventional burial.

Are there religious objections to Green/Natural Burial?

No. In fact, for all Muslims and some Jews, natural burial is required. Islam and Judaism each prescribe a ritual purification (washing), shrouding of the body after death, and accompanying prayers. Each religion prescribes a unique burial shroud.

Learn more about Islamic burial customs [HERE](#). Learn more about Jewish burial customs [HERE](#).

Want to learn more about Green/Natural Burial?

Go to our [Green Burial](#) page to:

- [Learn More About the Green Burial Council \(GBC\)](#)
- [View 2 Brief Slide Shows Depicting Actual Green/Natural Burials](#)
- [Listen to a Podcast on the Green Burial Movement](#)
- [View Short Videos on Green Burial in the U.S.](#)