

What is a Green Burial?

John A. Gentleman Mortuaries and Crematory in Omaha, NE



A green burial (sometimes also called a natural burial) is a way of caring for the dead in a way that has little environmental impact. It also helps conserve natural resources and habitats, protects funeral industry worker's health, and reduces carbon emissions.

Are green burials legal?

Yes. Green burials are legal. While some cemeteries may require families to purchase caskets or grave liners, this is their own individual policy. Cemeteries are within their rights to make these policies. But is it not the law that someone **MUST** be buried in a casket or with a grave liner. If you are interested in a green burial it is important to ask the cemetery of your choice what their policies are. You may have to find a different cemetery if the one you choose does not meet your needs.

Can anyone have a green burial?

Yes. Some people may wonder if they are a candidate for a green burial if they have undergone radiation or chemotherapy or if they passed away from an infectious disease. Or if they have implants or dental fillings. With green burials these are typically not a problem. The wonderful system of microbes in our earth acts as a filtration system. And most diseases are not infectious after death. Things like radiation and chemotherapy dissipate. It is also important to note that traditional burial methods do not fully seal away those things either. And funeral workers are exposed to all those things in the traditional embalming process.

How can I make my loved one's funeral "green?"

There are multiple points in the death care process that can be done in a green or natural way. While it may not be possible to have all components of funeral be "green," it is important to understand your options.

Green Funerals

Traditionally, funerals incorporate a viewing or wake. This public or private gathering prior to the funeral allows family and friends to gather and say good-bye to a loved one. When a green funeral occurs, it does not need to replace funeral traditions. There will, however, likely be some changes.

With a green funeral, wakes and visiting hours may occur, but the body is typically not viewed by the public. This is because with a green funeral the deceased is not embalmed with toxic chemicals. Private family viewings may occur to identify the body, however.

Green Burials

For a green burial, either the casket or urn, or the way the casket or urn is buried, can be considered "green." Traditional caskets are made of materials that can take many years to biodegrade. They are often painted with paints containing harsh chemicals. A green burial option is to use a biodegradable casket or urn. These burial containers are made from wood that is unpainted, cardboard, or other natural materials.

It is also possible in some instances to forgo a burial vault or liner. While not all cemeteries will allow this, some are starting to designate areas for this type of natural burial.

Green Cemeteries

Finally, the cemetery you choose can also be considered green. There are several different levels of green cemetery certification. Some cemeteries operated a hybrid model and designate a portion of their space for green burials. This means they do not require the use of burial vault or liner in these areas.

Then, there are also cemeteries that are fully green and natural. They have more restrictions on the types of materials used for grave markers or the types of pesticides used for lawn care. In these cemeteries all burials would be considered green using a biodegradable casket and no grave liners or vaults.

If you have more questions about green burials or cemeteries, don't hesitate to ask us. We are happy to help!