

What Are the Environmental Benefits of a Green Burial?

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The focus of a green burial is to lessen the environmental impact of the entire funeral and burial process.

Traditional burials are very resource heavy. Today, many people feel that the traditional funeral methods are not sustainable. However, many of the traditional funeral practices are simply that, traditional. The reason we do them is because that is what has been done for the last hundred years or so. But this certainly does not need to be the case.

A safer environment

The embalming process is a very traditional part of a funeral. The embalming process preserves a body for viewing. However, it is not necessary or required by law, as many people think.

Green funerals eliminate the embalming process.

When a body is embalmed, toxic fluids are used for preservation. These fluids pose a danger to the funeral home workers. And while funeral homes take steps to minimize the environmental impact of their use, it is likely that some of the fluids still escape into the environment at different points in the process.

Green burials eliminate the embalming process altogether. They may use refrigeration or dry ice to preserve a body, but that is typically all.

Conservation of metal and precious wood resources

Caskets are considered very resource heavy. They are made of metal and precious woods such as mahogany or cherry. They are typically not made of sustainable materials. The caskets are painted with heavy paints and finishes to protect them. It can take hundreds of years for a casket to biodegrade.

To be considered a green burial casket, the casket must be made of natural, sustainable, biodegradable materials. Things such as bamboo, cardboard or cork can all be used.

Reduction of carbon footprint

Vaults and monuments have a very large environmental impact. They require considerable resources to make. Traditional caskets are placed inside a concrete grave liner, which does not break down or biodegrade. Headstones can also take up valuable resources and take considerable energy to make – from mining to transport.

Green funerals try to eliminate the grave liners or other vaults. Often, they do not use traditional headstones. Instead they use a stone, bush, or tree to mark a gravesite. Or there may be one large monument for everyone buried in the cemetery with names and dates inscribed.

Conservation of the Natural Habitat

Since green burials eliminate things like headstones, vaults, and grave liners they also help preserve the natural habitat. With many traditional cemeteries, the lawns are maintained with pesticides. Most green cemeteries allow their lawns to be natural. In this case, flowers and native plants can thrive. Animals and wildlife are common and may find refuge in the area. In some cases, the cemetery itself is in a conservation area that sets aside the land not only for burial, but for the specific protection of plants and animals.

There are many ways that green burials can have a positive impact on the natural environment.

