

Green Burial

Green burials minimize negative environmental impacts by using biodegradable materials, avoiding toxic chemicals, and occurring on land maintained using good conservation practices.

Avoiding Environmental Harm; Providing Environmental Benefit

Conventional burial practices harm the environment: they involve hazardous chemicals, non-biodegradable materials, and cemeteries that are often ecologically barren due to herbicide and fertilizer use. The term “green burial” refers to burial practices that minimize negative impacts on the environment. Unlike conventional burials, green burials:

- Use burial shrouds or unsealed caskets made of renewable, biodegradable materials
- Avoid embalming fluids and other toxic chemicals
- Occur in green cemeteries, [hybrid cemeteries](#), or natural burial grounds that are managed to protect biodiversity and prevent pollution

Some people extend the eco-friendly principles of green burials to encompass other parts of the death process such as funerals (e.g., a family might seek contributions to an environmental charity in lieu of flowers or print programs on recycled paper).

Ultimately, there is no hard-and-fast definition of what constitutes a green burial. However, the [Green Burial Council](#) does operate a certification program for burial grounds, funeral homes, and products based on a set of [rigorous standards](#).

Cost

Green burials can cost far less than conventional burials because they do not require a vault, expensive casket, or embalming fluids. A simple shroud or pine casket costs



hundreds of dollars, not thousands. However, prices vary depending on a number of factors such as burial location and time of year.

Conservation Burial

Conservation burial is a form of green burial with an additional layer of environmental protection: the burial grounds are protected by [conservation easement](#), which ensures that they are managed in perpetuity in accordance with conservation principles. Conservation burial grounds are still relatively rare in the United States, but there are [a handful](#) listed by the [Conservation Burial Alliance](#). Conservation burial cemeteries seeking certification from the Green Burial Council (currently the only independent, third-party certifying entity in the world) must meet [standards of performance](#) to qualify.

The original tenets of conservation burial were established by Dr. Billy Campbell, the pioneer of conservation burial in the United States (and founder of the first-ever conservation burial ground in the world, Ramsey Creek Preserve in Westminster, South Carolina). Members of the Conservation Burial Alliance were instrumental in developing the original standards in 2005, and others in updating them again in 2019, along with land trust and green burial experts.

What About Cremation?

Opinions are mixed on whether or not cremation counts as a green burial practice. Cremation generates air pollution and requires more fossil fuels than burial in a biodegradable shroud or casket; however, it has a much smaller environmental impact than conventional burial,

since it does not require land, burial materials, or toxic chemicals.

The Green Burial Council does not certify cremation-disposition programs but acknowledges that there are ways to offset the carbon footprint of cremation. See the [FAQ page](#) on the Council's website for more information.

Resources

Articles and Fact Sheets

[On the Way to the Green Burial Cemetery: A Guide for Families](#)

[The Science Behind Green and Conventional Burial](#)

[Green Burial: An Environmentally Friendly Choice](#)

[What Is Green Burial Exactly?](#)

[11 Environmentally Friendly Burial Options](#)

[Answering Your Green Burial Questions](#)

[Important Facts to Know About Green Burials](#)

[These Biodegradable Burial Pods Will Turn You Into a Tree](#)

Lists of Green Burial Providers and Burial Grounds

[Green Burial Cemeteries in the U.S. and Canada](#)

[Natural End Map](#)

The Green Burial Council [website](#) has an [interactive map listing](#) of various types of green burial service providers..

Recreation and Conservation. [Nate Lotze](#) compiled this guide. Robert Campbell refreshed it in 2023.

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v. 12/9/2023



WeConservePA produced this guide with support from the Community Conservation Partnerships Program, Environmental Stewardship Fund, under the administration of the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, Bureau of