



Green burial organizations and Funeral Services are working to make burial more sustainable, economical, and consequential.

## Green Burial

By Elizabeth Fournier

Spending my last several years working as a small-town funeral director has given me the unique pleasure and privilege to serve families during their greatest time of need. I am always honored to be chosen to facilitate the journey of their loved one's passing. It is my role as a small-town minister that allows me to convey to the family that the death of our bodies is a sacred and spiritual passage.

"Death is not a period," says Swami Rama in his book *Sacred Journey: Living Purposefully and Dying*

Gracefully, "but merely a pause." As I see it, death is a spiritual transition, especially at the time of death of the physical body. The practical realization of passing away is guided by an advanced spiritual revelation. In the green burial movement, this advanced spiritual revelation is focused on the earth's well-being, and the movement attempts to realize this.

My own ethical and spiritual beliefs naturally veer me towards the path of a green burial, and I am increasingly not alone. Various sorts of natural burial options are

progressively more popular due to a collective, heightened consciousness. People aren't interested so much in how they will be remembered, but rather, how they can continue to give back, even in death.

Natural burial means no embalming, no elaborate casket, no burial vault: Just a body returning to the earth. The concept is quite biblical if you consider the beautiful simplicity of ashes to ashes, dust to dust.

Conventional burials typically involve toxic embalming fluids, which can leak into the ground



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water and water supply. Rare wood caskets and metal vaults are also commonly sunk deep into the earth. Burials green in color include only caskets made from biodegradable wood and other eco-friendly materials.

A green burial not only saves money, but open space is preserved as well. Allowing people to feel as though their last act on earth contributes to a positive purpose connects them in an almost holy way to this concept. It makes people’s eyes sparkle. Those who have laid loved ones to rest in this setting have found comfort in knowing the body will return to the earth as the circle of life continues.

The green burial movement is crucial to restore this freedom and choice, both during the actual death and in the arrangements made after death. It also enables a more “natural” death, surrounded

by one’s loved ones in one’s own surroundings. Important to note, the concept of natural death strives to include active family involvement and home funerals as well.

It’s been proven that participation by the mourners eases the grieving process. Being involved really does help the constant flow of energy, and the effect is quite evident. The idea is to bring everyone into the actual process. From a personal experience I had recently, it truly helped the distraught family to participate in making all the decisions, and I think in a practical way, it helped to be occupied.

The matriarch of the family had finally passed after many months on hospice care. The days following were amazingly powerful and quite personal for all involved. Her family clothed and laid her out on a bed in her living room. All

her friends brought food and flowers. They were able to look at her face and touch her hands and say goodbye. After the celebration of her life, she was brought to a burial space in a wooded area and her children slowly lowered her shrouded body. The day was glorious.

Until this century, funerals were a family ritual. I think that every person should have the choice as to whether or not they want to have a service handled by a funeral director, or if they want to re-claim their roles of caring for the dying and for the dead.

No matter the circumstances of loss, we are never prepared emotionally. It always seems sudden. By having our departed loved ones at home, we maintain control in an event that is otherwise beyond our control. We are assured that our loved ones are treated with the love that they deserve. We feel less a victim of circumstance. We are allowed the time we need to assimilate this loss into our lives. There is greater opportunity for healing and we are allowed ample time for an often difficult parting.

**For more information on green burials, visit: [http://cornerstonefuneral.com/resource\\_htms/green-burial\\_resources.htm](http://cornerstonefuneral.com/resource_htms/green-burial_resources.htm)**

