


BELLEFONTAINE
CEMETERY
AND ARBORETUM

GREEN BURIAL



Yesterday. Today. Forever.



Green Burial Defined

Green burial is among the most environmentally friendly and energy efficient forms of interment. The green burial council defines green or natural burial as “a way of caring for the dead with minimal environmental impact that aids in the conservation of natural resources, reduction of carbon emissions, protection of worker health, and the restoration and/or preservation of habitat. Green burial necessitates the use of non-toxic and biodegradable materials, such as caskets, shrouds, and urns.”

Many people choose to live green, and may wish to choose a deathstyle to match. Some choose green burial because they appreciate the intimacy and comfort it can provide for their loved ones. Still others choose green burial because it aligns with their religious beliefs. Whatever the motivation, green burial is an affordable alternative to conventional burial that honors both the deceased and the environment.

Burial Practices Then and Now

Green burial is the oldest and most traditional form of burial. Cultures around the world have been enshrouding their dead and burying them naturally for thousands of years. In fact, the practice of hiring a professional to care for the dead is largely a modern one. Less than 200 years ago, it was quite common for families to care for the deceased in their own home. Today in the United States however, conventional funerary practices typically look very different.

Around the time of the Civil War, the process of embalming emerged and gained momentum. Embalming is a process where blood in the body is replaced with chemicals as a means of temporary preservation. Modern embalming developed in part to bring deceased soldiers home from the battlefield for burial.

In the years following the Civil War, the practice of embalming became more mainstream as morticians experimented and improved their practice. By the mid 20th century, embalming became a key component in the typical American funeral. At the same time, death care, visitations, and services had moved out of the family home and into funeral establishments. The funeral industry was



growing and introducing a variety of products designed to honor the deceased and bring comfort to families. These products included the metal caskets and vaults commonly found in modern American funerals.

Today, most Americans' experiences with death care are limited to conventional burial, in which the deceased is usually embalmed for a viewing and funeral service, and then buried in a casket and vault. It is not common for families to participate in the actual burial of their loved one, or even to witness the lowering of the vault into the grave. Interestingly, embalming remains common only in the United States and Canada today.

Green Burial

Green Burial is the return to pre-19th century practices in which an unembalmed body is laid to rest in a biodegradable container. It is the most environmentally friendly method of burial, producing a smaller carbon footprint and releasing far fewer toxins into the environment than other options. Green burial minimizes one's carbon footprint through:

- The natural breakdown of the body in appropriate soil depth and conditions
- No use of chemicals for preservation
- Burial free of vaults, metal caskets, or other synthetic containers containing metals, varnishes, sealers and preservatives that over time break down and are released into the environment
- Biodegradable, natural plant-derived outer container: wicker, bamboo, rattan, pine coffin or casket: cotton, wool or linen shroud; renewable materials are used and not exotic (rain forest) hardwoods
- natural memorialization such as plantings or stones
- Burial site remains as natural as possible in all respects, with limited mechanized maintenance; no chemical applications of fertilizer, pesticides or herbicides
- Often in a more natural setting that is less manicured, or that is set aside for land conservation

“I want [upon death] to be buried, just like in the old days, where I decompose by the action of microorganisms [...] I will have recycled back to the universe at least some of the energy that I have taken from it. And in so doing, at the conclusion of my scientific adventures, I will have come closer to the heavens than to Earth.”

- Neil deGrasse Tyson



Did you know..

- ❖ According to the U.S. Center for Disease control, embalming provides no public health benefit. In fact, the chemicals used in embalming are highly toxic. OSHA requires embalmers to suit up in full-body coverings complete with respirators while embalming.
- ❖ It is legal for the family to provide their own after-death care for the deceased in the state of Missouri including a private or home viewing. In some states, professionals known as deathcare midwives can assist with this process.
- ❖ Green burial does not mean burial must occur immediately. Modern refrigeration allows families the flexibility to schedule funeral services and burial along the same reasonable timeline recommended for most conventional burials.
- ❖ Casket manufacturers are consistently on the EPA's list of each state's top 50 hazardous waste producers due to the toxic chemicals emitted from the finishes applied to metal caskets.
- ❖ Cremation is not truly a "green" alternative to traditional burial. The amount of energy needed to reduce a body to ashes is extensive. Toxins from the cremation process emitted into the environment include: dioxin, mercury, sulphur dioxide, carbon dioxide, hydrochloric acid and hydrofluoric acid.
- ❖ Green burial offers as much dignity and ceremony as the most



traditional of services. Green burial does not impact the ability to have military honors or other ceremonies common to conventional burial.



- ❖ A staggering amount of resources are buried annually in the U.S. through the process of conventional burial including:
 - ❖ 30 million board feet of hardwoods, including tropical hardwoods
 - ❖ 2,700 tons of copper and bronze in caskets
 - ❖ 104,000 tons of steel in caskets and vaults
 - ❖ 1.6 million tons of reinforced concrete in vaults
 - ❖ 827,000 gallons of embalming fluid

Shades of Green at Bellefontaine

Green burial is permitted throughout all of Bellefontaine Cemetery, whether on a new or existing family lot, or a single grave in a public lot. Individuals can choose to mix green burial options with traditional burial practices to meet specific wishes and desires. For example, one may choose to be unembalmed, without a vault, but choose to be buried on their family's historic lot, complete with matching headstone.

Bellefontaine has also established a dedicated green burial area known as Evergreen Meadow. Bellefontaine's Evergreen Meadow is a new site on a sunny hillside established exclusively for green burial. The space is surrounded by mature trees, drifts of flowering shrubs, and Missouri understory plantings to reduce lawn cutting. Grounds maintenance in this area is environmentally sensitive, with limited mechanized maintenance and no use of pesticides or inorganic fertilizers.

The goal of Evergreen Meadow is to have a naturalized landscape with as little negative environmental impact as possible. The area will continue to be planted with native plant species. Limited mowing will be done to control invasive and weedy plants to minimize environmental impacts. No pesticides, herbicides or fertilizers will be used unless absolutely necessary to maintain the native plants. Unlike green burial in other locations within the cemetery, graves in Evergreen Meadow are natural in appearance, and free of individual markers, monuments, or specific plantings.



Services At Bellefontaine Step-By-Step

Bellefontaine is the first and only cemetery in the St. Louis area to offer green burial products and services. In fact, we are certified by the Green Burial Council, and able to act as both the funeral home and cemetery for those seeking the green burial experience.



Green burial services may begin as any other funeral service would, with a service or a viewing. Bellefontaine's Hotchkiss Chapel is an ideal location for an intimate service for family and close friends. Family may choose to guide the deceased on our green burial cart to the gravesite themselves, or follow a motorized or horse-drawn funeral coach.



The grave will be dug to a depth of 4 – 4 ½ feet, thereby ensuring that the nutrient layer is within a higher soil stratum where microbes and oxygen can efficiently aid in returning the body to the earth.

The bottom of each grave is lined with a 1- to 2-inch thick layer of biomass, consisting of woodchips, palm fronds, evergreen boughs or other plant material readily available on the grounds.

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Families and loved ones are permitted and encouraged to participate in the closing of the grave should they choose, beginning with lowering the body into the grave. Another layer of flowers, branches, and other local plant material is placed on top of the burial container, blanketing the body. Earth is mounded approximately 2 to 3 feet above every interment.

“I have been telling everyone about how awesome, intimate, real, and beautiful Hank's interment was. Happy to promote the cause.”

-Gus S., regarding his green burial experience at Bellefontaine

Should you wish to learn more about Bellefontaine Cemetery's green options, pricing, and availability, please contact Gracie Griffin at ggriffin@bcastl.org or Richard Lay at rlay@bcastl.org, or call 314-381-0750.



Bellefontaine Cemetery is proud to be certified by the Green Burial Council. For information on the certification process, other green organizations, and green resources, please visit www.greenburialcouncil.org.

Additional Resources

A Greener Funeral, sponsored by Passages International at www.aGreenerFuneral.org.

The Funeral Consumer's Alliance at <https://www.funerals.org/>.

Consumers rights by state, provided by the Funeral Consumers Alliance at <http://funeralethics.org/rights.htm>.



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