



End-of-Life Care That's Good For the Planet

Reclaiming death care practices that are community focused and environmentally-friendly.



THE REEMERGENCE OF GREEN BURIAL: A RETURN TO NATURE

In recent years, there has been a significant shift in how we approach end-of-life care, with many people seeking more eco-friendly funeral options. At the forefront of this movement is green burial, a practice that honors the deceased in a way that minimizes environmental impact and fosters a return to natural cycles.

This edition of Farewell Earth explores the history of green burial, its benefits, and the growing trend towards sustainable funeral practices.

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FAREWELL EARTH IS A NONPROFIT WITH A MISSION TO FOSTER HONEST CONVERSATIONS ABOUT DEATH AND DYING, PROMOTE ECO-FRIENDLY DEATH CARE PRACTICES, AND RECLAIM THE SIGNIFICANCE OF RITUAL AND REMEMBRANCE.

WE BELIEVE IN A WORLD WHERE THE END-OF-LIFE PROCESS IS NOT SHROUDED IN FEAR BUT EMBRACED AS A NATURAL, MEANINGFUL CHAPTER OF OUR JOURNEY.



BENEFITS OF GREEN BURIAL

Environmental Preservation:

Green burials forgo the use of toxic chemicals and non-biodegradable materials, resulting in a significantly lower carbon footprint.

Biodegradable caskets, shrouds, and natural grave markers ensure that the burial site remains in harmony with the surrounding ecosystem.

Land Conservation:

Many green burial grounds are established as nature preserves or conservation areas. This dual purpose of protecting land and providing burial space contributes to the preservation of natural habitats and biodiversity.

Cost-Effectiveness:

Green burials can be more affordable than traditional burials. The elimination of embalming, concrete vaults, and elaborate caskets reduces costs, making eco-friendly options accessible to more people.

Personal and Spiritual Significance:

For many, the idea of returning to the earth in a natural way holds deep personal and spiritual significance. Green burial offers a way to honor loved ones while also respecting the environment.

THE REEMERGENCE OF GREEN BURIAL: A RETURN TO NATURE

THE CARBON FOOTPRINT OF MODERN BURIAL PRACTICES

Traditional burial practices in the United States have a significant environmental impact. Embalming fluids, often containing formaldehyde, pose health risks and environmental hazards. Non-biodegradable caskets and concrete vaults further contribute to the ecological burden. According to the Green Burial Council, conventional burials in the U.S. use approximately 4.3 million gallons of embalming fluid, 20 million board feet of hardwood, 1.6 million tons of concrete, and 64,500 tons of steel each year.

Additionally, the energy required to manufacture these materials and maintain cemeteries contributes to the overall carbon footprint. Municipal cemeteries are rapidly reaching capacity, exacerbating the need for alternative approaches that are both sustainable and respectful to the land.

A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE ON GREEN BURIAL

Green burial, also known as natural burial, is not a new concept. It reflects ancient and global burial practices that allow the body to decompose naturally and return to the earth. In early American history, burial was typically a simple process involving a wooden coffin or even just a shroud, with the body interred directly in the ground. This method was both practical and environmentally friendly, aligning with the natural cycle of life and death.

However, the Civil War era brought about a significant change. The practice of embalming gained popularity as a means to preserve the bodies of soldiers for transport back home. This led to the widespread adoption of embalming fluids and more elaborate burial practices, marking the beginning of modern conventional burial methods.



GREEN BURIAL IN AMERICA

The growing interest in green burial is reflected in the increasing number of green cemeteries and conservation burial grounds across the United States. Organizations like the Green Burial Council provide certification and standards for green burial practices, ensuring that these interments are conducted in an environmentally responsible manner. Communities and municipalities are recognizing the need for sustainable burial options. As urban cemeteries reach capacity, green burial provides a viable solution that benefits both people and the planet. This approach not only addresses space limitations but also supports broader environmental goals.

The reemergence of green burial reflects a broader societal shift towards sustainability and environmental responsibility. By choosing green burial, individuals can reduce their environmental impact, support conservation efforts, and foster a deeper connection to the natural world. As awareness and demand for eco-friendly funeral options continue to grow, green burial is poised to become a cornerstone of modern end-of-life care. For those interested in exploring green burial options, organizations like Farewell Earth provide valuable resources and guidance to ensure that this final act of care for the earth is conducted with dignity and respect.



COMMUNITY SPOTLIGHT: ANNE WESTON

Anne Weston is the founder of Green Burial Project. She is a resident of Hillsborough, NC, with degrees from Duke University. She has spent her adult life desensitizing herself to her own mortality and in the last few years just decided — What the heck! Why not embrace it? Anne is supported in her work by conversation partners: a cemetery law attorney/law professor, home funeral guides, funeral directors, naturalists, and specialists in marketing, real estate, and land conservation.

Anne also provides Advance Directive workshops and supports the development of new death cafes. Her presentations include "The Case for Green Burial," "Beyond the Edge: Alternative Body Disposition Practices," "What Do You Want as You Age and How Are You Going to Get It?," and "Radical Recycling: Body Donation as a Final Gift."



A GUIDE TO HOME BURIAL: RETURNING TO EARTH ON YOUR OWN LAND

Home burial is a deeply personal and meaningful choice that allows families to lay their loved ones to rest on their own property. This practice, which harkens back to early American traditions, offers an intimate and eco-friendly alternative to conventional burial methods. If you are considering home burial in Wake, Orange, Durham, Alamance, or Chatham Counties, this guide will provide you with the essential information you need to proceed.

UNDERSTANDING LOCAL REGULATIONS

In Wake, Orange, Durham, Alamance, and Chatham Counties, the Planning and Zoning Departments place few restrictions on property owners considering home burial. However, it is crucial to verify specific requirements, especially if you live within city limits, where additional regulations or restrictions may apply. Additionally, you should check with your County's Environmental Health Department for any setback requirements from wells or streams to ensure compliance with local health standards.

LOCAL COUNTY PLANNING DEPARTMENTS

Wake

(919) 856-6310
336 Fayetteville Street,
#500
Raleigh, NC 27601

Orange

(919) 245-2598
131 W. Margaret Lane,
Suite 201
Hillsborough, NC 27278

Durham

(919) 560-4137
101 City Hall Plaza,
Ground Floor
Durham, NC 27701

Alamance

(336) 570-4063
201 W. Elm Street
Graham, NC 27253

Chatham

(919) 542-8285
P.O. Box 54
Pittsboro, NC 27312



PREPARING FOR HOME BURIAL

Once you have confirmed the regulatory requirements, you can begin preparing for the home burial. Here are key considerations:

Shrouding the Body: Shrouding the body is a traditional and environmentally friendly way to prepare your loved one for burial. You can use a family quilt, which adds a personal touch, or opt for a biodegradable shroud. These materials ensure that the body will return to the earth naturally, in harmony with the environment.

Biodegradable Caskets: Working with a local woodworker who specializes in making biodegradable caskets is another excellent option. These caskets are crafted from natural materials that decompose over time, reducing the environmental impact. A locally made casket can also be a beautiful and unique tribute to your loved one.

Digging the Grave: You have several options for digging the grave. While the grave can be dug by hand, this can be physically demanding and time-consuming. Alternatively, you can rent an excavator or hire a local gravedigger to assist with the process. Ensure that the grave meets any depth requirements specified by local regulations to prevent disturbance and promote safe decomposition. Most gravesites should be at least 50 feet from a well or stream. Please confirm this setback with your local Environmental Health department.

LONG-TERM CONSIDERATIONS

Home burial is not only a significant decision for the present but also for the future. Here are some long-term considerations:

Access for Heirs: It's important to note that heirs may have access to the grave in perpetuity. This can provide a lasting place of remembrance for your family. However, this access could potentially impact the property's value if it is sold in the future. Prospective buyers may have concerns about the presence of a grave on the property, so it's wise to consider this aspect carefully.

Documentation: Keep detailed records of the burial, including the exact location of the grave and any related documentation. This information should be shared with heirs and future property owners to ensure that the grave is respected and maintained.

Maintenance: Ongoing maintenance of the burial site is essential to preserve its dignity and appearance. Regular upkeep ensures that the site remains a peaceful and respectful resting place for your loved one.

Home burial offers a deeply personal and environmentally conscious way to honor your loved ones. By understanding and adhering to local regulations, preparing thoughtfully, and considering long-term implications, you can create a meaningful and sustainable resting place on your own property. If you have any additional questions, do not hesitate to reach out to the relevant county departments or local professionals who can guide you through the process.



A GUIDE TO SCATTERING AND BURYING ASHES

CREMATED AND AQUAMATED REMAINS

If you choose to bury or scatter cremated or aquamated remains on your property, there are some additional considerations to keep in mind:

Alkalinity of Ashes:

Ashes, or bone dust, from cremation or aquamation are highly alkaline and can affect the soil's pH balance. To foster healthy plant growth at the burial site, it is often recommended to mix the ashes with a soil amendment. This helps to neutralize the alkalinity and create a more suitable environment for plants.

Burying Ashes:

The process of burying ashes is generally simpler than full-body burial. You can choose a special urn or biodegradable container designed for ashes. These containers will gradually break down, allowing the remains to integrate with the soil.

Scattering Ashes:

Scattering ashes on your own property is another meaningful way to honor a loved one. Ashes must be scattered on private property with the permission of the landowner. Many State Parks also allow ash scattering. On the coast, it is important to remember that State Law requires the ashes to be scattered 3 miles out to sea, at 600 feet deep. Many people choose to disperse ashes on the beach; and while Farewell Earth cannot recommend this, it is a common practice.

Choose a Meaningful Location: Select a spot that holds significance for you and your loved one. This could be a favorite garden, under a beloved tree, or a peaceful meadow.

Ceremony: Consider holding a small ceremony or gathering to mark the occasion. This can be a time for family and friends to share memories and say their goodbyes in a way that feels personal and respectful.

Environmental Impact: While ashes are generally safe to scatter, it is still important to consider the impact on the surrounding environment. If you are scattering a large amount of ashes, be mindful of the potential changes to the soil's pH and nutrient balance.





EXPLORING AQUAMATION: THE ECO-FRIENDLY ALTERNATIVE TO GREEN BURIAL

As the movement towards sustainable and environmentally friendly end-of-life options grows, green burials have become a popular choice for many. However, there is another method that is gaining recognition for its eco-friendly benefits: aquamation. This innovative process offers a greener alternative to traditional cremation and presents a compelling option alongside green burials.

WHAT IS AQUAMATION?

Aquamation, also known as alkaline hydrolysis or water cremation, is a gentle and eco-friendly process that uses an alkaline solution to break down the body. Unlike traditional cremation, which uses intense heat to reduce the body to ashes, aquamation mimics the natural decomposition process, reducing the body to its basic elements in a more sustainable way.

HOW DOES AQUAMATION WORK?

The aquamation process involves placing the body in a chamber filled with an alkaline solution. Over the course of several hours, the combination of heat, water, and alkali breaks down the body's tissues, leaving behind the bone remains. The bone fragments are then processed into a fine powder or ash, similar to the ashes produced by traditional cremation. Aquamation ashes don't contain harmful byproducts of combustion and they are white because they haven't been subjected to intense heat.

ENVIRONMENTAL BENEFITS OF AQUAMATION

Lower Carbon Footprint: Traditional cremation releases significant amounts of carbon dioxide and other pollutants into the atmosphere. Aquamation, on the other hand, has a carbon footprint that is up to 90% lower, making it a much greener alternative.

Energy Efficiency: The energy required for aquamation is significantly less than that for traditional cremation. By using water and alkaline rather than high heat, aquamation conserves energy, making it a more sustainable choice.

No Air Pollution: One of the major environmental concerns with traditional cremation is the release of harmful emissions, including carbon dioxide, toxic gases, and mercury from dental fillings. Aquamation produces no air pollution, as the process occurs in a sealed chamber.

Aquamation represents a promising alternative to traditional methods, combining the environmental benefits of green burial with the affordability and convenience of cremation. As we continue to seek sustainable solutions in all aspects of our lives, aquamation offers a respectful and eco-friendly option for those looking to honor their loved ones while caring for the planet.



LOCAL PROVIDERS

GREEN BURIAL CEMETERIES

Bluestem Conservation Cemetery - Cedar Grove | www.bluestemcemetery.org

Westwood Cemetery - Carrboro | www.townofcarrboro.org

Historic Oakwood - Raleigh | www.historicoakwood.org

Maplewood Cemetery and **Beechwood Cemetery** - Durham | durhamnc.gov

FUNERAL HOMES

COMMITTED TO ECO-FRIENDLY PRACTICES

Endswell: A Modern Funeral Home

Hillsborough | www.endswellfuneralhome.com

Renaissance Funeral Home

Raleigh | www.rfhr.com/



COMMUNITY EVENTS

WELCOME TO FAREWELL EARTH

JULY 23

4PM - 5:30PM

ROBERT AND PEARL SEYMOUR CENTER

BEYOND THE VEIL:

EMERGING TRENDS IN DEATH CARE

AUGUST 3 2PM

DURHAM COUNTY MAIN LIBRARY

SCIENCE CAFE:

FROM DEATH TO DECOMPOSITION

AUGUST 15 7PM - 9PM

NC MUSEUM OF NATURAL SCIENCE

DAILY PLANET CAFE

END-OF-LIFE GUIDES:

PERSPECTIVES FROM

DEATH DOULAS AND HOSPICE NURSES

SEPTEMBER 21 2PM

DURHAM COUNTY MAIN LIBRARY

ORANGE COUNTY DEATH CAFE

JULY 17, AUGUST 21, SEPTEMBER 18

6PM - 8PM

ENDSWELL FUNERAL HOME

DEATH CAFE RALEIGH

JULY, AUGUST, SEPTEMBER

6:30PM - 8:30PM

RENAISSANCE FUNERAL HOME

At Farewell Earth, we are dedicated to providing information and resources on all forms of eco-friendly death care. Whether you choose a green burial, aquamation, or another sustainable method, the most important thing is to make an informed decision that aligns with your values and the wishes of your loved ones.

VISIT OUR WEBSITE OR CONTACT US TO MAKE A CONTRIBUTION IN SUPPORT OF THE PUBLICATION OF THIS NEWSLETTER.