



## **NATURAL BURIAL FACT SHEET, GLOSSARY**

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*with gratitude to glossary language from the Conservation Burial Alliance.*

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Nearly 54 percent of Americans are considering a natural burial, and 72 percent of cemeteries are reporting an increased demand, according to a 2019 survey conducted by the National Funeral Directors Association (NFDA).

**What is a natural burial?** The Green Burial Council believes cemeteries, preserves, and burial grounds can broadly be considered “natural” or “green” when they meet the following criteria:

- care for the dead with minimal environmental impact
- conserve natural resources
- reduce carbon emissions
- protect worker health
- restore/preserve habitat

Specifically, the green burial community is committed to:

- Refrigerating the decedent instead of embalming with formalin-based fluid
- Foregoing the use of grave liners and vaults
- Using biodegradable containers, caskets, flat burial trays (or shrouding boards) simple urns. Metal nails, hardware, glues, resins, plastics, and other synthetics are not recommended.
- Shrouds of linen, cotton, or silk. Clothing that's similarly biodegradable.
- Discontinuing herbicides, pesticides, fertilizers on cemetery lawns
- Using flat stone markers or GPS coordinates to mark grave sites
- Supporting land conservation and restoration

## BASIC TERMS

**Biodegradable:** Items that break down into natural materials and are capable of being decomposed by bacteria or other living organisms.

**Burial density:** The size, depth, ratio, and distance of burial plots from each other. Natural burial plots are typically larger than conventional plots and are determined by terrain.

**Shrouding board:** A board designed to securely carry a shrouded/fabric-wrapped decedent to the grave; also known as a body board or trundle coffin which may be simply a flat expanse or plank with handles, usually buried with the body.

**All-wood construction (AWC) pegged pine casket:** A perfectly acceptable green burial container (having no metals hardware or nails, with holes drilled in base panel to hasten the decedent's return to the earth). This vessel, commonly used in Jewish burial, is useful when the funeral has been delayed, or the decedent's condition is compromised. Both Jewish and Islamic practices of burial are considered natural.

**Hybrid burial ground:** A conventional cemetery that offers the essential aspects of natural burial, either throughout the cemetery or in a designated section. Green Burial Council (GBC)-certified hybrids do not require vaults and must allow for any kind of biodegradable burial container.

**Natural burial ground:** A specific type of cemetery that allows full body interment in the ground without embalming, in a biodegradable container without a surrounding grave liner or vault.

**Conservation burial ground:** A type of natural cemetery established with a conservation management plan in partnership with a conservation organization that upholds best practices and provides perpetual protection of the land according to a conservation easement or deed restriction.

**Meadow burial:** Burial in a field-like setting where grasses are allowed to grow, mowed perhaps once a year.

**Woodland burial:** A burial in the forest among the trees; gravesites are left alone to naturalize with little to no interference from grounds keepers other than to provide access to the gravesite.

**Memorial Forest:** Property used for scattering of cremated remains, usually without the protection of being a licensed cemetery.

**Green-washing:** The act of deceptively marketing goods or services by hiding dubious aspects of their environmental profile.