

# Natural Burial Q & A

## 1. What is natural burial? What is the difference between “green” and natural burial?

Natural burial can be viewed as a return to the traditional customs of pre-industrial society. The purpose of a natural burial is to allow the body to quickly and naturally return to the elements of the earth and begin the regeneration of new life. A natural burial does not use embalming fluid, a casket, or a burial vault. The remains are usually placed directly into the earth, allowing the body to decompose naturally. The process has minimum impact on the environment.

The terms “natural burial” and “green burial” are often used interchangeably. There are various “shades of green” in natural burial. A totally green burial will not use any machinery or heavy equipment for digging the grave site. These graves are all dug by hand. The restored prairie section at Resurrection Cemetery has met the Green Burial Council standards for a Natural Cemetery.

## 2. What type of coffin/casket is used for natural burial? (Where can these be purchased?)

The body can be buried in a biodegradable casket, a woven basket, or a simple burial shroud as long as it doesn't inhibit the decomposition of the body in any way. Some examples of environmentally friendly containers would be a simple wooden casket (with no glue, metal, or varnish), a cardboard or woven casket, or a shroud. A shroud is a large piece of fabric that is used to wrap the body. These can be made of unbleached cotton fabric, muslin, linen, silk, felted wool, bamboo, or hemp. A king sized cotton bed sheet can even serve as a simple shroud. If using a shroud, the body will also need to be placed in a woven container to ensure the stability of the body as it is placed in the earth. Samples of these can be found on the *Passages* website [www.passagesinternational.com](http://www.passagesinternational.com). Your funeral home will be able to assist you in this purchase.

## 3. Is embalming required by law?

There is no law that stipulates that bodies must be embalmed. If there is a public viewing of the body, by law it needs to be embalmed. Special circumstances, such as an extended time between death and burial or the transportation of remains on commercial flights may necessitate embalming.

## 4. How soon does burial have to take place with natural burial?

If embalming is not done, Minnesota law requires that the body be buried or cremated within 72 hours of the time the body is released from the place of death or released by the coroner or medical examiner. If embalming is not chosen, refrigeration of the body allows the time-line to be extended up to six days.

## 5. Can family have a viewing of the body if it is not embalmed?

Policies and laws for viewing un-embalmed bodies vary by state and funeral home. Viewing is often limited to the immediate family. Refrigeration and dry ice are methods of temporary preservation that some funeral homes use in lieu of embalming. Some funeral homes offer the option to have the body embalmed with a plant-based embalming fluid that is acceptable for natural burial.

## 6. Will the body be able to be at Church for the funeral?

Yes. The body will be treated like any other body. If someone is shrouded, a rented casket can possibly be used for the funeral Mass and its rites. It is also possible for a shrouded body to be brought into the church. Please check with your church and funeral home regarding your options.

## 7. What will the burial site look like?

At Resurrection Cemetery, the restored prairie section has met the Green Burial Council standards for a Natural Cemetery. We have a designated area where burial vaults will not be used. The individual graves will not be marked. However, there will be a sacred touchstone dedicated to various saints that mark the area. The individual's name, birth and death dates will be inscribed upon it. The grounds/graves will be planted with only native Minnesota prairie grass and flowers. These will not be chemically managed. There will be no sprinklers and a less-manicured landscape. This area will be maintained in perpetuity with the rest of the cemetery.

## 8. How deep will the burial be? Is there any concern about animals disturbing the grave?

Natural burial can occur in no less than one foot deep. We plan on burying 4 feet deep. Studies have shown that animals do not disturb these graves. It has been shown that only 12 inches of soil is needed to prevent animals from digging into graves. Pioneers buried in cemeteries near wilderness areas and did not experience grave disturbances from animals even with relatively shallow graves.

**9. How will we know where the person is buried?**

Records of each burial will be held by the cemetery and there will be a grid map with the approximate location of the individual gravesite.

**10. What will burial rites look like? Will they be different from other ways of burial?**

Prayers from The Order of Christian Funerals will continue to be used for burial rites. What will be different from a regular earth burial is that the body will be placed on a wooden cart after leaving the hearse. The family will escort the body to the gazebo for the prayers of commendation. From there the body will be moved to the gravesite and placed in the grave. With proper authorization, the family may have the option of filling the grave if they so wish.

**11. What will natural burial cost? Shouldn't it be cheaper than regular ground burial?**

While there may be less cost associated with a funeral because of the lack of embalming, a biodegradable casket or shroud, and no grave liner, the cost of opening and closing the grave will remain fairly standardized. In the beginning of establishing a natural burial section, the cost around development of the site is actually higher than it would be with a regular earth burial.

Many who chose natural burial have a commitment to the preservation of the earth. Every year, over 100,000 tons of steel and 1,500,000 tons of concrete are used for traditional burials. Natural burial is earth friendly. It is nature at its finest - pure and calming.

**12. Can cremated remains be buried in the natural burial section?**

We know that there are cemeteries that do allow cremated remains to be buried in biodegradable containers. However, at this time in consultation with numerous focus groups, we have decided to just accept full bodies in the natural burial section of our cemetery.

**13. Are there restrictions about how one needs to be clothed for natural burial?**

If the body of the deceased is clothed, the clothing must be made of natural fibers such as cotton, linen, wool, or silk that will decompose. The garments should be free of all plastics and metals such as buttons, zippers, and hooks. Jewelry, belt buckles, and other materials that are not biodegradable also cannot be buried with the deceased.

**14. Can I sell back to you my present grave to move to the natural burial option?**

We will consider this in a similar way to how we allow this with other types of burial. The price you paid for the other burial option will be applied to the natural burial site. Of course, there will be paperwork involved.

**15. Will the "Additional Rite of Burial" (AROB) be allowed in the natural burial section? No**

**16. Can I purchase two graves so that my spouse and I can be buried next to each other? Yes**

**17. Can we leave flowers on the grave?**

Many times fresh flowers are placed in the grave with the body. Again, there can be no wires, ribbon, glass, or metal with these items. Flowers without vases etc., can be left on the gravesite and will be picked up by our field staff at the end of the day. Because this is a natural prairie, no other remembrances can be placed in this area following a burial. Families will be given a packet of prairie flower seeds that can be planted on the grave site following the burial.

**18. What if I want natural burial but my spouse/partner does not wish to do so?**

We have located the natural burial section near our chapel mausoleum that has the options for both full body and cremation interment. We have a new columbarium on both the west and east sides of the mausoleum. A garden with cremation boulders is also being developed in this general area. This whole area is linked with landscaped walk-ways. In this way, family members can be in close proximity to their loved ones.

***In all instances, you should check with your funeral director to see if they accommodate natural burial.***