

GREEN MOUNT CEMETERY NATURAL BURIALS

Many communities around the country are employing a burial practice known as natural or green burial. Essentially, a natural burial is a way of caring for the remains of our loved ones with minimal environmental impact. Natural burials can contribute to the reduction of carbon emissions, the protection of workers' health, and the restoration and preservation of habitat.



Green Mount Cemetery has established a natural burial section, called The Orchard, where we will employ best green burial and maintenance practices, which we describe in this document. Natural burial may be available in other sections of the cemetery, pending consultation with the cemetery director.

Green Mount Natural Burial Practices

The objective of a natural burial is to compost the body in the ground as fast as naturally possible. To achieve this goal, the following practices are followed:

- *Timing:* It is crucial that burial of the body occurs as soon as possible, even during the winter months. If the family can alert the cemetery director as death becomes imminent, that information is extremely helpful. In all cases, pre-planning for a natural burial is indispensable for ensuring that families' needs are met and best burial practices are employed.
- *Body preparation:* The body is buried within a natural wood casket, a shroud, or other natural cloth covering. Please note that at times odors as well as stains on the shroud/cloth coverings may be present.
- *Body transportation:* Family/friends are expected to manage the transportation of the body to the gravesite, with the assistance of a funeral home if they have arranged for one, or on their own. Cemetery staff may not be able, and should not be counted on, to assist.
- *Grave depth:* The burial of a non-embalmed body is no shallower than 3.5 feet.

- *Lowering of body:* Once the body is delivered to the cemetery, it is crucial to place it in the grave as quickly as possible. Green Mount typically uses a wide rough-cut board (or boards) with natural-fiber rope handles that are left with the body.
- *Graveside service:* After the body is placed in the grave, graveside services can begin. Family/friends are encouraged to participate in shoveling backfill into the grave.
- *Backfill:* If the soil in a natural burial site is gravel, clay, or otherwise unsuitable for proper decay, additional soil, called backfill, will be added. Green Mount uses a mix of our own compost and sand for backfill. The family is welcome to provide additional organic material, such as compost, or complementary materials such as alfalfa pellets, which assist in jump-starting the composting process. These family-supplied materials will be added to the top of the body before backfilling. Since natural burial is so recent a practice, we do not know how much time it takes a body to fully compost and the best natural additives to place with the body to enhance that process. We will update our practices as we learn.
- *Memorialization:* In The Orchard, granite grave markers are mandatory and must be flat. Natural burials in our traditional monument sections, where upright gravestones are present, will need prior approval from the director. A new section with upright memorials for natural burials is being designed. Regardless of location, all natural burials must be marked.
- *Soil settling:* The backfill will settle as the body is composting and additional soil will be added. For winter burials, bales of hay will be placed on top to keep the soil from freezing. All graves are constantly monitored and will be filled in as needed.
- *Gravesite disturbance:* While we have not seen any disturbance caused by animals, natural burial graves are under constant observation.
- *Maintenance of graves:* In The Orchard we will be adding wildflower seeds and this section will be mowed once in the fall (see our information flier, “Green Mountain Natural Resources Management,” for more information on “low-mow” practices).
- *Gravesite plantings:* Please contact the cemetery director for further information.

For more information or to schedule an appointment:

Email: cemetery@montpelier-vt.org ● Phone: 802-223-5352

More information on natural burials can be found at: <https://www.greenburialcouncil.org>