

**Natural Burial Glossary**  
**Conservation Burial Alliance**  
**Green Burial Council**

<https://www.conservationburialalliance.org/definitions.html>

<https://www.greenburialcouncil.org/green-burial-glossary.html>

**Adapted vegetation** Non-invasive, beneficial plants (not noxious weeds) that have adapted to the specific locality; provides habitat and requires little or no maintenance.

**After-Death Care Educator** An individual who specializes in explaining and supporting those involved in a variety of after-death care options and practices through public and professional education.

**Arrangement conference** A meeting with a funeral professional or cemetery sexton or steward to discuss funeral and/or burial details.

**At need arrangements** Decisions and purchases made at the time of death rather than in advance, including selection of gravesite, burial container, type of service, etc. (see also *pre-need arrangements*).

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**Back country** A remote, undeveloped area, intentionally preserved as wilderness to provide intact habitat for wildlife. While it may be accessible on foot, it is not maintained via trails or other access routes and is categorized in land management plans as a protected ecosystem.

**Baseline Document** A report that describes the existing, pre-development environmental conditions of a site.

**Beneficiary** The person with whom the pre-paid contract for burial rights was made.

**Best Practices** A professional method or procedure, accepted or prescribed as being the most effective way to achieve stated goals. Established techniques or methodologies that, through experience and research, have proven to lead to a desired result. Also known as best management practices.

**Bier** A raised device or platform that holds the casket, either during a vigil or funeral service.

**Biodegradable** Items that can break down into natural materials in the environment without causing harm and are capable of being decomposed by bacteria or other living organisms.

**Biomass** Usually comprised of wood chips, biomass is organic matter used to create energy that aids in the decomposition process when added to the grave.

**Burial Containers** Caskets and shrouds capable of being decomposed or biodegraded by bacteria or other living organisms; often made of plant or animal fiber (wicker, sea grass, paper, linen, cotton, wool, willow, bamboo, etc.). Metals, glues, resins, plastics, and other synthetics that are non-biodegradable are not recommended.

**Blended Funerals** Funerals that combine conventional funeral practices with home funeral and/or green burial practices; may include the use of a funeral director for certain aspects of care, such as obtaining, completing and filing paperwork or transporting the body. Families may have a home funeral without having a green burial and visa versa. Blended funerals offer families more options, especially when certain options are not available in their area.

**Burial Density** The size, depth, ratio, and distance of burial plots from each other in an acre of a cemetery. Green burial plots are typically larger than conventional burial plots and are determined by terrain.

**Burial Ground, Cemetery, Preserve** Burial ground, cemetery, and preserve are all different names used in relation to conservation burial grounds.

**Burial Plot, Burial Space** The space in which a body is buried.

**Carrying Capacity** The number of people, animals, or crops which a region can support without environmental degradation.

**Caskets** Containers for the dead, previously called coffins. The terminology appears to have evolved as a marketing tool to emphasize the precious cargo. "Casket" (from Middle English *casse*, and Anglo-Norman French, *cassette*) was originally used to denote a small ornamental box, case, or chest for carrying jewels, letters or other valuable items. Conventional caskets are built of steel, copper, and other metals, fiberglass, and exotic woods. Many are dressed with symbolic or religious icons, jewels, engravings, fittings, or trimming (fabric lining).

**Casket carts, carriages, or wagons** A non-motorized means of transporting the body to the gravesite.

**Celebrant** A professional trained in designing and officiating at customized ceremonies that reflect the needs, beliefs, and values of the person being honored. Many celebrants are trained in non-denominational and/or interfaith rituals. Many clergy are celebrants but not all celebrants are ordained clergy.

**Cenotaph** A monument, wall, bench, stone, or other structure engraved with the name(s) of the dead; often placed in a central location in a cemetery and used in place of an individual grave marker.

**Certificate of Interment Rights** A document that conveys the right to interment in a burial space, rather than a real estate title.

**Clergy** A person ordained to perform specific religious duties; the duties and titles vary among religions (minister, brother/sister, pastor, rector, priest, deacon, apostle, bishop, chaplain, rabbi, etc.)

**Coffins** Six- or eight-sided containers for the dead used for burial or cremation. Eight-sided coffins, also called "toe-pinchers," may be designed to conserve wood or to emphasize the shape of the human inside (wide shoulders tapering to small feet). Plain pine boxes tend to be thought of as coffins, though there is no limitation. Derived from the Greek word *kophinos*, meaning "basket."

**Commingling** The act of burying together, in combination.

**Committal service** An elective ritual that occurs after a funeral service ideally at the graveside; literally "committing the body or ashes to the earth and the care of God"

**Companion grave** A grave in which two bodies are buried side by side in the same unit.

**Conservation** The act of preserving, protecting, or restoring the natural environment, natural ecosystems, vegetation, and wildlife.

**Conservation Easement** A voluntary legal agreement between a landowner and a land trust (or government agency) that permanently limits the uses of the land in order to protect its conservation values.

**Conservation Management Plan** A working plan that is a tool for identifying and implementing the practices needed to properly manage a conservation property.

**Conservation Objectives** Objectives which seek to identify values of the land that are important to preserving and restoring native habitat, hosting species, watersheds, and other defining features that support ecological, biological, and human communities.

**Conservation Organizations** Nonprofits and governmental entities organized to acquire, monitor, and manage land, rivers, forests, and other natural resources in order to preserve and protect them through prudent management.

**Conservation Policies** Set of internal rules aimed at conserving or restoring a declining species, a community, an ecosystem, or a natural or semi-natural site.

**Conservation Values** Evaluation of a property for its conservation features and resources—such as wildlife and plant habitat, connectivity, water quality, working lands—that deserve preservation or protection through deliberate action.

**Contiguous** Sharing a common border; touching.

**Covenant** A formal binding written agreement or promise between two parties; a solemn agreement or understanding, as in the details of a conservation easement.

**Conventional cemetery** A cemetery that requires the use of a concrete or fiberglass grave liner and a hard-bottom casket; also known as a "lawn cemetery" or a "modern cemetery." Prior to the establishment of modern cemeteries, most burial occurred in churchyards or on family land and was environmentally friendly. Modern cemetery requirements are dictated by "convention" rather than law.

**Cremated Remains** The reduced remains of a body to sodium and calcium phosphate through the process of incineration by fire.

**Cremation** The process of reducing the body of the deceased to bone fragments and ashes by the use of high heat; the cremation of an average body uses enough natural gas and electricity to produce 140 lbs. of CO<sub>2</sub>.

**Cultural Resources** Historic, scenic, and recreational assets of significant value, such as: evidence of early cellar holes, barns, outbuildings, orchards, agricultural buildings or artifacts, or recreational structures; vista views, water frontage, unique natural features, or sky views; logging or other forestry or agricultural roads or pathways for walking or hiking. [See Natural Resources Inventory]

**Decedent** The dead person

**Decomposition** The breakdown of the body by natural means (soil, water, heat and microbes in balance); natural decomposition, the goal of green burial, occurs when no chemicals or non-biodegradable elements (steel, resins, fabrics, cement vaults) impede the process or attempt to preserve the body.

**Deed restrictions** Private agreement listed in the deed that restricts the use of the land. [See *Conservation easements*]

**Disinterment** The act of taking a body out of a grave.

**Disturbance of Soil** Digging, routing, or otherwise significantly disturbing natural elements of land to the detriment of the environment (see land disturbance).

**Duff** The more or less firm organic layer on top of mineral soil, consisting of fallen vegetative matter in the process of decomposition, including everything from leaf and twig litter on the surface to pure humus.

**Dry ice** The solid form of carbon dioxide; may be used to cool and preserve a body temporarily during a *home funeral(home vigil)*. Dry ice must be handled carefully to avoid skin burns and requires good ventilation due to off-gassing of CO<sub>2</sub>.

**Eco-friendly** Products and practices designed to have a range of effects on the environment, from being beneficial to being the least damaging available option.

**Ecological Assessment (EclA)** A document that provides information, guidance, and

support for changes in land management regarding agricultural, forestry, and other activities; may be conducted on its own or as part of a broader environmental assessment that identifies and evaluates the possible impact on ecosystems and assists in formulating plans that ensure best biodiversity outcomes. [See Best Management Practices]

**Ecologically appropriate features** Natural, inanimate elements of the landscape such as rocks, water features, native or adapted vegetation, and un-vegetated ground.

**Ecological Objectives** Objectives that seek to understand the nature of environmental influences on individual organisms, their populations, and communities. Ecological objectives are the measurable actions that support realization of stated ecological goals.

**Ecological Stewardship** Responsible use and protection of the natural environment.

**Education** Commercial and non-commercial activities that either actively impart knowledge through instructors or passively impart knowledge through self-directed learning when such activities are consistent with the protection of the Conservation Easement Area.

**Embalming** The process of removing blood and fluids from the dead body and inserting preservatives, surfactants, solvents, and coloration to slow decomposition and improve looks for a period of up to two weeks. Organs are punctured and drained of fluid with the use of a sharp instrument called a trocar; waste is disposed of in a standard septic system or municipal wastewater treatment plant.

**Embalming fluid** An array of chemicals, including benzene, methanol, ethyl alcohol, and ethylene glycol (antifreeze). Formaldehyde, which constitutes anywhere from 5 to 29% of the solution, is associated with increased risk of ALS (Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis), myeloid leukemia, lymph hematopoietic malignancies, and brain cancer in embalmers.

**Endemic** Refers to a species whose natural range is restricted to a particular area.

**Endowment Fund** A fund required by most states for long-term cemetery maintenance; some cemeteries call it a "perpetual care fund", "care and maintenance trust fund", or "long-term restoration fund".

**Excavation** The act of digging a grave.

**Fieldstone** A naturally formed stone harvested directly from the earth on or near the cemetery property; they may be engraved, left in their natural form on a grave surface, and not polished or set in footings.

**Final Disposition** The last place a body is intact; the process by which the body is laid to rest.

**Flora** The plants of a particular region, habitat, or geological period.

**Geographic Information System (GIS)** The system used to capture, track, and record grave locations by source data, including latitude, longitude and elevation coordinates.

**Geology** The branch of science that deals with the history of the earth, especially as recorded in rocks.

**Global Positioning System (GPS)** A radio navigation system utilizing satellites that is often used in green cemeteries in lieu of monuments to establish and map grave location. GPS is accurate in all weather conditions and all hours of the day, making it universally accessible in most locations.

**Grave Decoration** Items placed or arranged to enhance the appearance of the grave. Site appropriate native plantings are not considered decoration, but help fulfill grieving families' need to "leave a mark" that makes the grave prettier. However, true grave decorations that do not fit in with a natural aesthetic are discouraged (some conservation burial sites do not allow them at all). This includes coping (surrounding the grave with an oval of stone), holiday decorations, beer or liquor bottles, framed photos, etc. Cut flowers are encouraged, but not those that contain invasive seeds. Other acceptable grave decorations include transient items such as bird nests, etc.

**Grave Liner** An outer burial container that only covers the top and side of the casket, usually made of plastic, fiberglass, or metal. [See Outer Burial Container]

**Green Burial** 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.

**Green Burial Ground** Green burial ground or a green burial cemetery is a generalized term often used synonymously with natural burial ground.

**Green burial movement** The growing interest in, development of, and grassroots advocacy for, green (natural) burial throughout the world.

**Green cemetery** See *Green Burial Ground*.

**Green embalming fluid** A biodegradable, non-toxic, non-carcinogenic, and formaldehyde-free alternative to conventional embalming fluid. The process of embalming is the same regardless of which fluid is used.

**Green embalming or professional green body preparation** The services provided by a funeral director that will culminate in a green burial; non-invasive, natural means of

cleansing and preparing the body. If embalming is necessary or requested, the GBC approves an essential oil-based product.

**Green funeral** A general term used to describe post-death care, from death to disposition, using only natural means (nontoxic preservation techniques and organic materials with minimal carbon footprint); sometimes confused with the term "home funeral," "green burial," or "home burial."

**Greenwashing** The act of deceptively marketing goods or services by hiding dubious aspects of their environmental profile. In the case of green burial, the full picture of environmentally sound practices is important. Using a casket of organic materials but made by using fossil fuels and child labor and transported 3000 miles to its destination is not considered "green" (environmentally sound).

**Habitat conservation** A land management practice that conserves, protects and restores habitat for plants and wildlife; an essential element of conservation burial practices.

**Hemp ropes or straps** Naturally made assistive devices for lowering coffins and shrouded bodies into the ground during natural burial, usually involving family and friends.

**Home burial** The practice of full body interment on residential land, usually in a rural setting. Local zoning and health department regulations apply, as do state-approved setbacks for known sources of water, buildings and highways. Often these are considered family cemeteries and must be established and reported as such to government agencies and are usually restricted to blood relatives or extended family.

**Home funeral** The process of family and friends, next of kin, or designated agent retaining custody and control of the body for the time period between death and disposition (burial or cremation); sometimes referred to as *home vigil* or DIY funeral. A home funeral involves bathing and dressing the body and using dry ice, Techni-ice, or other cooling mechanism as a preservative; it commonly lasts 1-3 days. A *home funeral guide* or *after-death care educator* may provide education and support either prior to or during this time period.

**Home funeral movement** The growing interest in, grassroots advocacy for, and support of, home funeral; the home funeral movement started in the 1980's.

**Home vigil** A home vigil is similar to a home funeral; the terms may be used interchangeably. A home vigil may refer to the practice of family and friends sitting with the body continuously while lying in honor in the home, or it may simply refer to the time period from death to disposition.

**Hybrid Burial Ground** A cemetery that allows vaults and offers green burial.

**Hydrology** The branch of science concerned with the properties of the earth's water, and especially its movement in relation to land.

**Integrated Pest Management (IPM) System** A system in which biological, cultural, mechanical/physical and/or chemical factors are evaluated to create a long-term pest management plan that minimizes danger to people, property, and the environment; frequently used in green burial cemeteries to enhance the environmental mission.

**Interment** Burial of the full body or the cremated remains of the deceased in a grave.

**Invasive Plants** Plants that grow so profusely that they take over. Usually not native, though there are some natives which can take over in areas that have been altered. Being non-native does not mean that a plant is invasive.

**Islamic burial** Any of a number of burial practices common to the Islamic faith, depending on the sect, including: collective bathing of the body, shrouding of the body, prayer (*salah*), unfettered burial of the shrouded body in the grave within 24 hours, and positioning of the head facing towards Mecca. Cremation is forbidden to Muslims.

**Jewish burial** Any of a number of burial practices common to the Jewish faith, including: burial within one day of death, wrapping the body in a white linen shroud made without knots, using a plain, wooden coffin containing no metal, and providing for direct contact with the earth (achieved by drilling holes in the bottom of the coffin, using a bottomless vault, or having a green burial).

**Land Disturbance** the removal of vegetation and duff from the earth by human activity resulting in the exposure of mineral soil where the expanse of exposed mineral soil covers more than fifty (50) square feet and is unrelated to construction, maintenance, repair or reconstruction of any trail or right of way.

**Landscaping** In the context of conservation burial should focus on ecological restoration and design. To the extent possible, infrastructure should be green. Plant material should be site appropriate in terms of habitat and locale, with a focus on local cultivars.

**Life cycle assessment or analysis** The analysis of the potential impact on the environment of a particular product, process or service over its lifespan, including its extraction, production, distribution, consumption, and disposal.

**Life cycle costing (LCC)** The accounting process used to evaluate the economic possibilities of products or systems over their useful lives by evaluating the cost of operation and maintenance.

**Lowering device** A mechanical device used in a conventional cemetery that aids in lowering a casket into the ground. *Hemp ropes or straps* are often used for this purpose in a green burial.



**Meadow burial** Burial in a field-like setting where grasses are allowed to grow and are mowing occurs once a year; a green burial practice.

**Memorial Forest** Property used or scattering of cremated remains, usually without the protection of being a licensed cemetery (only California requires cremated remains rest in a cemetery; all other states view final disposition as being at the crematory) or of being in an active relationship with a *bonafide* conservation land trust with an articulated agreement such as a conservation easement, that will protect the land and its remains in perpetuity.

**Memorialization** The process of honoring the dead by marking where a burial has taken place; can include an engraved headstone or stone monument with a written account of the person being commemorated, a QR code, a photo, object, or in the case of a green or natural burial, a fieldstone, wooden bench, tree, shrub, or sculptural art using natural materials. Memorialization in conservation burial grounds is minimal, consists of natural materials, and preferably those derived from the conserved property.

**Memorial Markers** Memorials/grave markers in conservation burial can be live as in memorial vegetation; inert as in stones, benches or naming opportunities; or virtual memorials based on GPS that provides more than names and dates. These memorials can be site specific to the graves themselves or at some distance (as in a cenotaph or memorial wall with names inscribed). In all cases, the memorials should not detract from a natural aesthetic, and if possible should be ecologically functional and appropriate to the ecological and geological context.

**Memorial service** A gathering of mourners at which the body is not present.

**Monitoring** The act of observing, checking, or keeping a continuous record of something. Easement monitoring is conducted on a scheduled basis to observe the condition of the conservation easement property to determine whether it is in compliance with easement terms.

**Native Plants** Plants that are indigenous to a specific habitat. Native plants include those species understood as indigenous, occurring in natural associations in habitats that existed prior to significant human impacts and alterations of the landscape.

**Natural Burial Ground** A type of cemetery that allows full body interment in the ground, without embalming, using a biodegradable container, and without a grave liner or vault. Cremated remains and pet remains? may be accepted in natural burial grounds.

**Natural Resources Inventory** A document that inventories the natural resources of an area, collects the data in a usable format and interprets the findings. Natural resource inventories provide solid baseline data for long-term monitoring and management and allow for comparisons between existing and desired conditions.

**Natural viewing** The viewing of an un-embalmed body; typically the body has been prepared for viewing in the home or in an outdoor setting.

**Opening and closing** The digging and filling of a grave, the fee for which is separate from that of the burial plot. Some green cemeteries allow families to assist in digging the grave, though many cemeteries prefer a groundskeeper to perform this task for the protection of surrounding vegetation and for safety and liability reasons. Many green cemeteries allow or encourage families to replace the soil layers (fill the grave) as a part of the graveside ceremony.

**Outdoor Recreation** Commercial or non-commercial recreational uses expressly including, but not limited to, hiking, camping, picnicking, non-motorized cycling and other non-motorized activities, equestrian activities, wildlife observation, physical exercise, assemblies of person outdoors, hunting, fishing and other activities consistent with the protection of the Conservation Values.

**Outer Burial Container** An outer burial container is either a burial vault or a grave liner that encases a casket or shrouded body. Both are used to support the soil around the casket from subsidence in most non-green burial cemeteries to minimize cemetery maintenance by keeping the lawn flat for mowing. [See Vault and Grave Liner].

**Permaculture** Agricultural systems and principles that are sustainable and self-sufficient; working with natural forces in land management and conservation to minimize labor and maximize efficiency without depleting the land.

**Perpetual Care Funds** Money placed in trust by cemetery officials meant to generate income for future maintenance, repair, and renewal of systems associated with the cemetery and individual graves.

**Plat map** A specialized map that identifies where all the plots will be located. Some green cemeteries do not follow a rigid placement of *plots* on a *plat* grid.

**Plot** The space in which a body is buried.

**Preneed arrangements** Arrangements made prior to death, including gravesite selection. *Preneed arrangements* can be made without pre-paying, although funeral homes and cemeteries usually encourage pre-paying; consumer protection groups recommend not paying.

**Primitive Amenity** An unenclosed, uncovered structure for use by persons, including, but not limited to, benches, observation platforms, wildlife observation blinds and decks, unconnected to any utilities including electrical, communication, water, septic, or sewer services. Living trees, standing dead trees, and fallen trees may be incorporated into the structure of a Primitive Amenity.

**Regional harvesting** The practice of acquiring materials generated from within a 500-mile radius of the job site through harvesting, extraction or processing.

**Restoration Ecology** The practice of renewing, restoring, or assisting in the recovery and management of degraded, damaged, or destroyed ecosystems and habitat. Restoration cemeteries may have areas in need of environmental restoration of plant systems, or need supplementation to provide optimum habitat for wildlife to restore the proper balance to the ecosystem within and surrounding the burial ground. Along with improving biodiversity, restoration ecology also involves developing sustainable cultural practices and providing regional and historical context.

**Restored green cemetery** An un-used or unkempt cemetery that has been purchased, gifted or otherwise transferred to be revitalized and repurposed through green burial; it may have been historical, abandoned, filled up, under-funded, or reverted from private to municipal.

**Road Right of Way** The area that may be routinely disturbed as necessary for maintaining a road, including the lane of travel, ditches, embankments, pull-offs, stockpiles of road construction aggregates (including, but not limited to, gravel and fill), and parking for vehicles and equipment.

**Scattering** Spreading, casting, or burying of cremated remains.

**Section** Portions of cemetery acreage, often visually separated by woods, naturally distinct, or landscaped areas.

**Serial burial** The practice of re-using burial space after a determined length of time, usually 20-30 years, *ad infinitum*. This practice is common in other countries; there are no known laws against it in the US. By contrast, conventional US cemeteries may allow a one-time *double depth* burial where a spouse is buried on top of an existing grave.

**Shrouding board** A board designed to securely carry a shroud-wrapped body to the grave; also known as a body board or trundle coffin. The board may be simple or ornate, and may be buried with the body or removed prior to interment for re-use.

**Shroud** Fabric cloth or sheet that is wrapped around the deceased for burial; often shrouds have a built-in rigid board for carrying, or are carried on a *shrouding board*.

**Sustainable agriculture** Food, fiber, or other plant or animal farming techniques that support the environmental mission and contribute to the financial health of a green burial cemetery.

**Techni-Ice** An effective, non-toxic, reusable dry ice replacement used to cool the body of the deceased; it is purchased in plastic sheets, activated and frozen. Unlike *dry ice*, it does not off-gas or cause vapors or condensation, and can be re-used indefinitely.

**Trail** A cleared pathway created and maintained in a manner that does not cause sedimentation in surface water. Certain structures may be incorporated in the structure of a trail, including, but not limited to, ropes, cables, railings, steps made of rock, log steps, hand-holds, ladders, stones, log cribs, ramps, geotextile and ground coverings,

gravel, other log or stone structures embedded in the walking surface, structures made from chemically treated lumber, ramps and sign posts. Living trees, standing dead trees, and fallen trees may be incorporated into the elements of the foregoing composite structures that form a trail.

**Trail Amenity** A simple structure constructed from untreated wood, uncoated stone, or of masonry construction that may furnish various benefits to trail users, including, but not limited to, physical comfort, shelter, water, access to a fragile habitat, and/or information unconnected to any utilities except to underground electrical lines. Living trees, standing dead trees, and fallen trees may be incorporated into the structure of a Trail Amenity.

**Vault** A container made of concrete, plastic or metal, that encloses a coffin or casket to help prevent a grave from sinking and provide some protection from the elements. The vault is installed into the grave. At the burial, the casket is placed inside the vault and sealed. Generally, outer burial containers are not required by state or local laws, but they are oftentimes required by conventional cemeteries to prevent the grave from collapse due to heavy maintenance equipment and ground settling. Also known as burial vault, grave vault, cemetery vault. [See Outer Burial Container]

**Wake** A period of keeping *watch* or *vigil* with the body of the deceased that may involve prayer, music, reading, storytelling or other rituals and family traditions; derived from a time when witnesses stayed by the body to be certain the person did not "wake up."

**Weeds** A weed is a plant that is not valued where it is growing. It usually is known to have vigorous growth and can be native or non-native.

### **Wildlife Habitat**

A combination of food, water, shelter, and space arranged to meet the needs of birds, butterflies, beneficial insects, and small animals. Trees, shrubs, and other plants provide shelter and food.

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

**Xeriscaping** Landscaping that conserves water by using plants with low water needs, soil amendments that retain moisture, and mulching to reduce evaporation; intended to eliminate or greatly reduce artificial irrigation.