



Green Burial Q & A

Whether you're exploring environmentally friendly burial options at Sunset Memorial Park or simply curious about what makes green burial unique, this guide answers common questions with clarity and care.

1. What is green burial? Is there a difference between a green burial and a natural burial?

Green burial is an environmentally conscious alternative to traditional burial, focusing on a natural return to the earth. In a green burial, the body's remains nourish the soil, supporting new life and contributing to the preservation of the planet for future generations.

The method is designed to minimize the carbon footprint by forgoing conventional preparations of the body and using biodegradable materials for interment. The terms "natural burial" and "green burial" are often used interchangeably. However, there are various "shades of green" when it comes to these burial practices.

2. What type of coffin or casket is used for natural burial? Where can these be purchased?

Caskets made from biodegradable materials, woven baskets, and burial shrouds designed to align with sustainable practices and support organic decomposition are commonly used for green burials. These containers differ from those used in traditional burials, as they are free of chemically treated finishes, synthetic linings, or metal components that could hinder their return to the earth. Sunset Funeral Home & Cremation Center offers a variety of environmentally friendly options and can assist families in choosing a container that meets their preferences.

3. Is embalming required?

Embalming is not required for interment in Sunset Memorial Park's green burial section, 'The Meadow.' In fact, embalming is only permitted if natural burial-compliant fluids are used, which aligns with Illinois state law.

4. How soon does interment take place with natural burial?

Under Illinois law, a loved one's remains must be interred within seven days of passing unless they are kept in a climate-controlled environment. This time frame ensures that the decomposition process begins in a timely manner, conforming to the principles of green burial.

5. Can a public viewing be held if the body is not embalmed?

A public visitation of an unembalmed body can be held only if certain conditions are met to ensure safety and public health. Funeral homes often have additional policies so it is always best to consult with them for guidance. At Sunset Funeral Home, visitations are permitted if the body is embalmed using natural burial-compliant fluids.

6. What will the burial site look like?

The grassy burial sites within 'The Meadow' offer a similar beauty to those in other areas of the cemetery. Each space is thoughtfully maintained to harmonize with the surrounding landscape and can accommodate a personalized mahogany gravestone. Visitors can pay their respects while reflecting or enjoying a peaceful moment in the charming gazebo.

7. How deep will the burial be? Will animals disturb the grave?

For a double-depth natural burial in the 'The Meadow', the first burial is placed at 8 feet and the second at 5 feet. For a single-depth burial, the placement is at 5 feet. These depths exceed the state of Illinois' minimum requirement of 18 inches. Research and historical evidence indicate that as little as 12 inches of soil is sufficient to prevent animal disturbance.

8. How will we know where a loved one is buried?

The cemetery will maintain detailed records of each burial, and a grid map will provide the approximate location of individual spaces. Graves marked by mahogany gravestones will be easily identifiable.

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

There is typically less cost associated with a natural burial since it doesn't require a grave liner or burial vault. However, other costs are generally standardized. The staff at Sunset Memorial Park is always happy to review package pricing and options.

10. Can cremated remains be buried in the green burial section?

Yes, cremated remains can be interred within the green burial section, provided they are housed in a biodegradable urn made from materials such as bamboo, willow, or banana leaves. Sunset Funeral Home & Cremation Center offers a selection of these eco-friendly urns to suit different aesthetic tastes and budgets.

11. May I sell back my current grave to move to 'The Meadow'?

This is an option we offer and will handle similarly to how we manage other types of transfers. The amount you originally paid for the current space can be applied toward the new site.

12. Can a ceremony be held in the green burial section?

Yes, a ceremony can be held at the pavilion located within the green burial section. The same elements that make graveside services meaningful, such as prayers, readings, music, or moments of reflection, can be incorporated into the ceremony.

13. Is it possible to purchase two graves to ensure my spouse and I can be buried next to each other?

Yes, more than one space can be purchased at the same time. While two graves can be purchased side by side, we also allow double-depth burials. Both options ensure that couples or those who shared a special connection in life can remain close, even in burial. We recommend designating specific family members or friends as site owners. Planning ahead in this way can alleviate future decision-making stress for loved ones.

14. May we leave flowers on the grave?

Yes, fresh-cut flowers and natural decorations, such as wreaths, are welcome and can be placed on a loved one's grave. Our staff will periodically remove them to maintain the beauty of the area once they begin to fade or wilt.

15. What if I prefer natural burial, but my spouse/partner does not?

We understand that preferences may vary within families. In such cases, two side-by-side spaces can still be purchased, with one located in the green burial section and the other just outside its boundaries.