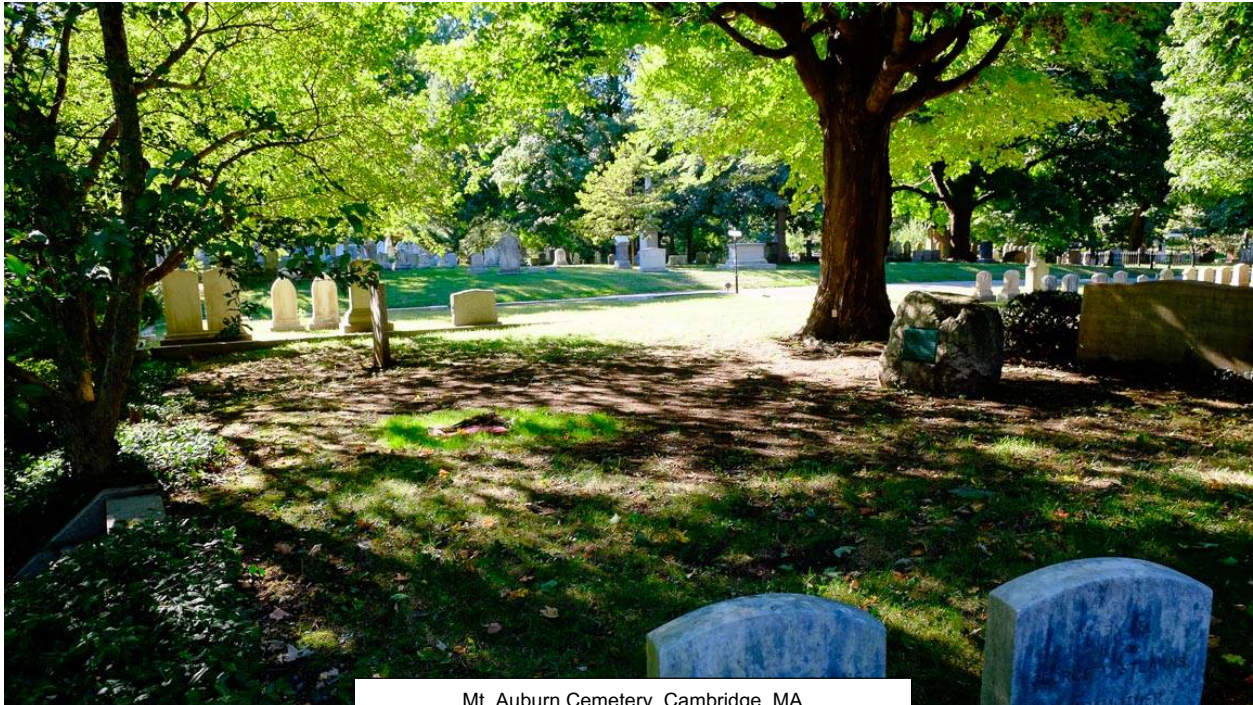




Frequently Asked Questions About Hybrid Cemeteries



Mt. Auburn Cemetery, Cambridge, MA

Q. Are hybrid areas mowed?

A. It is entirely up to the cemetery officials to determine the appropriate or desirable methods of maintaining the green burial section. Some choose to make the area consistent with the conventional area by mowing, some choose various other ways of balancing access and sustainable management with aesthetics. Keep in mind that heavy machinery will compact soil, which could impact decomposition by reducing oxygen flow and water saturation rates.

Q. How are graves laid out in a green hybrid section?

A. Plot location can be similar to conventional where families buy plots ahead of time or the decision may be made at the discretion of the sexton, depending on the cemetery's operating plan. Graves set side by side will require a rotation plan, potentially maximizing burial density in the long run. Many green burial cemeteries sell the right to be buried in a certain area but retain the ability to determine the exact location. This is particularly prevalent in woodland burial areas where tree roots, rock, ledge, water and other natural impediments may require the grave to be shifted a distance away from the original site. This also gives the cemetery the ability to prepare graves in fall for winter burial and to follow their own burial plot sequence through the area or the entire cemetery. This is made clear in the contract at the time of purchase.

Q. Are co-burials possible in a hybrid green cemetery?

A. Depending on the choices made by the operators and trustees, the burial of one full body and the cremated remains of another may be acceptable. Dual occupancy of one grave is generally not feasible, but it is up to the cemetery operators to determine.

Q. What will be expected of the hybrid cemetery employees at the time of burial?

A. Green burial services, though often more family participatory, do not differ greatly from conventional services. Funeral directors and clergy are often involved, directing and guiding the event as usual. If a professional is not involved, a family member educated by staff prior to the event should be designated to be in charge of walking patterns, protocols, and accepted behaviors. Some green burial operators are routinely on hand to manage and support the family, making sure things are tended to properly. In many cemeteries, the personal touch of the sexton or steward being present is an important part of the experience. Maintenance workers will want to fine tune caring for the area once the mourners have left.

Q. Should we be concerned with the collapsing of the grave?

A. Grave subsidence at 3.5 feet is much less likely to occur than at 5 feet. Soil and moisture are factors, but for the most part, graves can be dug at this depth without fear of collapse. In some soils, cemetery operators choose to lay in temporary plywood supports for the walls that are removed prior to the service. Wide wooden planks set on either edge of the grave provide surer footing for those doing the lowering and will help to prevent the edges from crumbling. When the weather is especially damp, a deeper reservoir dug at one end of the grave will collect excess water, further reinforcing the integrity of the grave.

For more answers to general green burial questions, see [Frequently Asked Questions: Green Burial Defined](#)