



Top 10 Real Answers to Questions Real People Ask About Green Burial

(and yes, it's legal)

#1 Q. Won't wild animals dig up corpses?
A. No. Burials occur 3.5 feet under the ground with, at minimum, an 18-inch smell barrier. Animals are much more interested in living prey above ground than in working that hard. We're just not that delicious.

#2 Q. Won't we be able to smell them?
A. No. Same principles apply. And remember this from 5th grade science? Humans have a dismal sense of smell compared to animals. If they can't smell bodies, we surely won't be able to either.

#3 Q. Do green burials contaminate the water table or drinking water?
A. No. With burials at 3.5 feet deep, there is no danger of contaminating potable water that is found about 75 feet below the surface. Mandatory setbacks from known water sources also ensure that surface water is not at risk.

#4 Q. Do unembalmed bodies pollute the ground with chemo or other drugs?
A. Soil is the best natural filter there is, binding organic compounds and making them unable to travel. Microorganisms in the soil break down any chemical compounds that remain in the body. We lose more toxic chemicals during a day of living than a whole body will decomposing.

#5 Q. How long does it take for a body to completely decompose?
A. Depending on soil type, oxygen availability, and moisture present, it takes on average 6 weeks to lose the majority of soft tissue through moisture absorption by the soil, and up to 2 years for complete decomposition. It may take up to twenty years for bones to absorb in moist soils.

#6 Q. What soil conditions are the most favorable for green burial?
A. Well drained soils with some clay content to absorb organic compounds, and an active biological presence of bacteria are ideal for promoting efficient decomposition. This allows for aerobic decay, followed by anaerobic decay, resulting in rich soils high in nitrogen content and organic compounds.

#7 Q. How are graves marked?
A. It varies by cemetery, but graves are typically marked with GPS coordinates, plat diagrams, and/or some type of physical marker, such as native plants, trees or shrubs, or a plain or engraved fieldstone.

#8 Q. Do green cemeteries reuse burial plots?
A. There are no laws against reusing a plot. In many countries, graves are routinely "rented" and refilled at a later date, often removing the bones to an ossuary. Green burial cemeteries have the ability to reuse ground space in the future if desired.

#9 Q. How much does it cost?
A. The cost varies by cemetery. Most hybrid cemeteries report that graves cost the same or somewhat less than conventional cemeteries. By replacing a vault, steel or exotic wood casket, and embalming costs with a biodegradable casket or shroud, the resulting savings may be significant.

#10 Q. How are green cemeteries managed?
A. Just like conventional cemeteries, green space can be privately managed, run by a corporation, a faith organization, a municipality, or other entity. They may partner with land preservation, volunteer or other organizations to provide aboveground recreational, agricultural, or educational opportunities.