



# Green Burial Massachusetts

## *Reclaiming a Dying Tradition*



*Carolina Memorial Sanctuary, Mills River, NC Courtesy of Caroline Yongue*

### **Green Burial, Natural Burial, Conservation Burial . . . What's the Difference?**

Green burial and natural burial are two names for the same thing: a burial in which the body and everything that accompanies it into the ground is nontoxic and readily biodegradable. It can be done in any cemetery or burial ground that does not require an "outer burial container," i.e., a vault or a grave liner.

A conservation cemetery is one that takes green burial a step further, incorporating the cemetery into a land conservation project. The land is protected from development by a conservation restriction, and is available for multiple recreational uses such as hiking and birding.

### **Is Green Burial Legal?**

Yes, green burial is legal.

Massachusetts state law does not require embalming, metal or hardwood caskets, use of a grave liner or vault, or any specific burial depth. A cemetery's board of directors or a city or town's cemetery commission develops its own rules and regulations about the kinds of burials that are allowed in a cemetery. Typically, one needs to have been a resident of a town or city to use its cemetery.

A growing number of existing cemeteries have begun to permit green burial in specific areas within their grounds. Others are opening new sections just for this purpose. Some religious institutions or communities are also making green burial available to their members.

## Who We Are and What We Do

Green Burial Massachusetts (GBM) is a statewide all-volunteer 501(c)(3) nonprofit whose guiding principle is to restore death to its rightful place in the cycle of life. Our mission is twofold: to start the first green cemetery open to all in Massachusetts, and to educate the public about green burial.

## Massachusetts Conservation Cemetery

In 2019 we created a 501(c)(13) cemetery corporation in anticipation of purchasing a land parcel for a conservation cemetery. We follow up on leads, check maps, consult with our land trust partners, talk to realtors, and walk parcels in search of a piece of land that calls to us.

## Education

- We provide talks, workshops, webinars, and other educational programs about natural burial at public libraries, senior centers, green fairs, and other venues. Our presentations cover what green burial is, how it works, where it can be done, and more.
- We periodically offer volunteer trainings, to give others the resources and confidence to speak to groups about green burial.
- We educate municipalities and nonprofit organizations about natural burial.

## Request a Presentation

As part of our mission to educate the public about green burial, we are happy to provide speakers.

We request a donation and sometimes coverage of a speaker's costs. If this presents a hardship, please discuss it with GBM's Speaker Coordinator when requesting a speaker. Your donation is tax-deductible.

We can also send a representative to meet with you and your cemetery board or municipal officials. Contact us about your interest or need at (617) 393-5011 or at [info@greenburialma.org](mailto:info@greenburialma.org).

## How to Support Us

Cash donations allow us to pursue our mission of educating the public about green burial. They will also help with legal fees and other costs of land acquisition when the time comes. If you would like to make a tax-deductible contribution, please visit [www.greenburialma.org](http://www.greenburialma.org) to donate securely online via [Paypal](#), or send a check to:

Green Burial Massachusetts Inc.  
PO Box 323  
Greenfield, MA 01302



*Prairie Creek Conservation Cemetery, Gainesville, FL Photo courtesy of Melissa Hill*

A gift or sale of the right piece of land could be hugely beneficial to both the landowner and GBM. If you think your parcel, or one you know of, might be suitable for a conservation cemetery, we'd be glad to talk to you about what you've got and what we're looking for. Some combination of sale and gift may be possible. You can reach us at (617) 393-5011 or at [info@greenburialma.org](mailto:info@greenburialma.org).

Visit [www.greenburialma.org](http://www.greenburialma.org) to find:

- Information on green burial in Massachusetts
- A crowdsourced database on cemeteries in Massachusetts, including those that allow green burial
- Sources for green burial products and services
- Green burial in the news

If you have other ideas for supporting green burial in Massachusetts, including joining our cadre of volunteers, give us a call or send us an email.

We'd love to hear from you!