

Green Burial Massachusetts, Inc.

Examples of Green Burial Rules in Massachusetts Cemeteries

This document contains information compiled in November 2024.

Barre - <https://www.townofbarre.com/index.asp?SEC=3C64DD49-9F3A-419C-B788-83040822547A&DE=70DABAC8-F5B6-49EF-88F7-F0E271D53626>

Green Burial Rules

1. Green Burials are only allowed where permitted by the Cemetery Commission which is currently only in Jane King Cemetery.
2. The body of the deceased is to be prepared in an environmentally friendly way. Embalming and other preservatives as well as pesticides and/or weed killers are not permitted in this area.
3. The decedent's representative shall employ a licensed Funeral Director to oversee natural burials to ensure that all Massachusetts Regulations pertaining to the handling and transportation of bodies are followed.
4. Vaults are not utilized in green burials. Burial in a casket is not required. However, if one is used, it must be made of biodegradable material such as shroud, pine or cardboard container. Any clothing or shroud used to cover the body is to be readily biodegradable.
5. Burial depth will be three - four feet and the grave will be mounded to allow for settling.
6. Rules for fees, plantings and memorials are the same as for other town cemeteries.
7. Sequential burial will be used to minimize disturbance to the land, vegetation, and graves. One may pre-purchase the right to be buried; however, the actual site isn't assigned until time of need.
8. Town residents (only) may purchase the right to bury. A single lot is 5ft x 10ft; and the location of the grave will be at the discretion of the Cemetery Commission.

Bolton -

https://www.townofbolton.com/sites/g/files/vyhlf2836/f/uploads/rules_and_regulations_26_july_2022.pdf

Definitions

"Green Burial" or "Natural Burial" is understood to be a burial method with fewer environmental impacts than a traditional burial. The body is not embalmed, caskets or burial shrouds are made of biodegradable material, and no concrete grave liner or vault is used. The body is placed directly in the soil to biodegrade naturally. The gravesite may have a natural stone marker or no marker at all.

4. Interments

- a. All burials shall be under the personal supervision of a Cemetery Committee member or the Committee's designate.

Compiled November 2024. Please consult original sources for current rules.

- b. No interment will be made until all fees provided for in the then-current fee schedule adopted by the Committee has been paid. Any outstanding obligations due the Town, such as special service charges, must be paid before a grave is opened.
- c. All non-cremated burials shall be made in a concrete box of one-piece construction, together with a one- or two-piece cover of sufficient strength to permanently support the weight above it. See items f-m below for exceptions for Green Burial.
- d. All non-cremated burials shall be at a depth of approximately six feet, unless otherwise approved by the Committee or their designate.
- e. All cremation burials shall be at a depth of approximately eighteen inches. The location will be recorded on lot record cards.
- f. Green Burials will be permitted in the designated areas of West and Pan Cemetery.
- g. Green Burial containers may include caskets or shrouds, and must be made of natural, biodegradable and non-toxic/non-hazardous materials (e.g., untreated softwoods, wicker, bamboo, cardboard, wool, fiber, cloth, seagrass).
- h. No embalming fluids may be used in the preparation of the body. Removable medical devices are to be removed prior to burial. Any items buried with the body must be biodegradable.
- i. Shrouded bodies must be entirely wrapped and must be supported by a solid softwood board, such as pine, which stays in the grave. Plywood and particle board are not acceptable.
- j. Graves are dug to a depth of 4 feet. Graves will be mounded and mulched and allowed to return to their natural state. Cut flowers may be placed on top of a recent burial; otherwise, no decorations are allowed in the Green Burial section.
- k. Grave markers are permitted, but not required. Flat, natural fieldstone or granite markers should be no larger than 1' x 2". The stone may be engraved, but not polished. The top should be flush with the ground.
- l. Vaults and grave liners are not permitted in the Green Burial section.
- m. The Green Burial area will be maintained to preserve the natural environment.

Brewster - <https://www.brewster-ma.gov/cemetery-commission>

IV. RULES FOR TOWN OF BREWSTER GREEN BURIAL

1. The Town of Brewster does not provide interment services at any of the Town cemeteries. The services of a contractor approved by the Brewster Department of Public Works (DPW) should be secured for excavation for interment in Area C.
2. A burial vault (partial, inverted, or otherwise), vault lid, concrete box, slab, or partitioned liner should not be used.
3. The deceased should not be embalmed prior to a green burial.
4. Burial containers are to be limited to those made from materials that are nontoxic/nonhazardous, natural/plant derived, and biodegradable, with shrouds permissible (i.e. untreated soft woods, wool, cotton, hemp, linen, flax, cardboard, seagrass, bamboo, wicker, or papier-mâché).

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5. Shrouded bodies must be entirely wrapped and be supported on a solid, untreated board for transporting and lowering. The board must be at least as long as the body and as wide as the widest part of the body. Plywood and particle support boards are not acceptable.
6. Only one full body burial is permitted in each gravesite.
7. The deceased may be brought to the cemetery by a funeral director or the deceased's family and friends.
8. If not using the services of a funeral director, arrangements must be made for a town representative to be present to oversee procedures at the cemetery.
9. The funeral director or family is responsible for arranging for the deceased to be transferred from the transport vehicle to the burial site, making sure to meet the necessary strength and mobility standards required for the task.
10. Burial depth will be three and one-half (3½) feet to the bottom of the container or shroud.
11. Graves will be mounded and allowed to return to their natural state following burial.
12. The site marker should be a flat natural fieldstone or quarried stone, no larger than 2 feet by 1 foot and set without a foundation.
13. Natural wreaths and flowers are permitted. No plantings, artificial flowers, vases, potted plants, or other decorations are permitted.
14. Unless a tree is deemed unsafe, unhealthy, or contrary to conservation goals, all live trees will be left in place.
15. Pathways will be mowed.
16. Pesticides are prohibited from use at burial sites.

Cambridge – Mt. Auburn - <https://viewer.joomag.com/cemetery-services-guidelines-for-natural-burial-at-mount-auburn/0812115001458581681>

Chesterfield -

https://www.townofchesterfieldma.com/sites/g/files/vyhlf7606/f/uploads/cemetery_rules_regs_4_12_21_final.pdf

Green Burials In the case of a “green” burial which foregoes the use of a vault/grave liner and even of a casket, where ground subsidence issues and relevance to equipment access and use may be of special concern, the Cemetery Commission reserves its prerogative to restrict such burials to certain lots or a designated area of a Town cemetery as it and/or the Cemetery Superintendent may determine. Such a burial may be in whatever shroud or container the family chooses as long as it is biodegradable.

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Chilmark -

https://www.chilmarkma.gov/sites/g/files/vyhlf8411/f/pages/chilmark_cemetery_regulations_and_policies_2021.pdf

B. "Green Burial" is defined, for the purpose of these regulations, as a burial where the deceased is buried in a casket made of soft wood or other biodegradable materials like cardboard or wicker or is buried in a shroud made of natural fabric. The casket, shroud or natural burial trundle (wooden tray with handles used for transport or lowering) rests directly on the earth at a depth of 3.5ft - 4ft. No embalming chemicals, cement vault, grave liner, hardwoods, metals, plastics or non-biodegradable items are allowed in the grave.

C. Burial sites in the so called "King Plot" measure 4'x4' and are suitable for cremains only and one (1) upright or one (1) flat stone.

D. Cement liners and embalming are not required for burials.

Gill -

https://gillmass.org/files/Gill_Cemetery_Commission_Guidelines_for_Riverside_Woods_Jan2020.pdf

Riverside Woods Natural Burial Ground

1. The body of the deceased is to be prepared in an environmentally friendly way as described by the Green Burial Council standards for natural burial; embalming is not permitted. Any clothing, shroud, or coffin used to cover the body is to be readily biodegradable. Non-degradable objects may not be buried with the body.

2. The body may be brought to the cemetery by a funeral director, or by family and friends of the deceased. A board and straps may be used to lower the body into the grave or a contracted lowering device may be used. Arrangements must be made in advance with the Cemetery Commissioners if a funeral director is not used.

3. The deceased's family and friends may participate in the burial of the body to the extent they desire, subject to approval by the Cemetery Commissioners.

4. Shrouded burials are allowed with a biodegradable burial board. Burial in a casket is not required, However, if one is used, it must be made of biodegradable material such as pine, sea grasses, willow, or cardboard container.

5. Burial depth will be three - four feet to the bottom of the grave and the grave will be mounded to allow for settling.

6. Grave marker must be made from natural rock, such as fieldstone or river rock. Marble, granite and other impermeable rock/stone is not permitted. Grave markers may not exceed 400 square inches in size (or 18" by 18") and may not rest more than 3" above grade lying flat to the ground. No foundation is allowed. The grave marker may be engraved with the deceased's name, the date of birth, date of their death.

7. We use sequential burial to minimize disturbance to the land, vegetation, and graves. One may pre-purchase the right to be buried; however the actual site isn't assigned until time of need.

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8. The location of the grave will be at the discretion of the Cemetery Commission. Space will be saved so that partners may be buried in adjacent lots.
9. There shall be no planting or cutting of vegetation except with the written permission of the Cemetery Commission.
10. Winter burials will be at the discretion of the Cemetery Commission and weather conditions.

Lexington - <https://www.lexingtonma.gov/175/Green-Burials>

GREEN BURIALS

The Town of Lexington offers Green Burials at Westview Cemetery. In addition to the standard Westview Cemetery Rules and Regulations, Green Burials must also abide by the following rules.

Rules for Green Burials

Green Burials may only be performed in the sections designated for Green Burials.

Remains must be properly cared for, secured, and kept in refrigeration before arriving at Westview Cemetery for a Green Burial.

Funeral home service is required to handle remains for a Green Burial.

Green Burials must use an approved type of decomposing wood coffin. No interment may be made without an approved wood coffin.

Only one body burial per grave is allowed in any Green Burial sections.

No concrete vault liners, cremation burials, or disinterment will be allowed in any Green Burial sections.

Grave markers for Green Burials will be Two feet x One foot flush markers made of either granite or bronze. No other markers will be allowed in any Green Burial sections.

All other rules and regulations of Westview Cemetery must be followed. For more information on green burials visit Green Burial Massachusetts' website.

Montague

Policy for Natural Burials – Highland Woods Cemetery

1. The natural burial section of Highland Cemetery is reserved for burial that does not use a vault (partial, inverted or otherwise), concrete liner, slab, or partitioned liner.
2. No embalming is permitted during body preparation. Clothing or a shroud in which the body is wrapped is to be readily biodegradable. The Cemetery Commission reserves the right to refuse a body that is not properly prepared. Non-biodegradable objects may not be buried with the body.
3. Burial containers are to be limited to those made from biodegradable materials such as untreated softwoods, cardboard, wicker, fiber, etc.
4. Shrouded bodies must be entirely wrapped and be supported on a solid softwood board for lowering. Plywood and particle support boards are not acceptable.

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5. The body of the deceased may be brought to the cemetery by a funeral director, or by family of the deceased with the proper paperwork from the Board of Health.
6. The deceased's family and friends may fill in the grave to the extent they desire, with advance notice to the Cemetery Commission.
7. A board and straps may be used to lower the body into the grave or a contracted lowering device may be used.
8. Burial depth will be 3.5 - 4 feet from the natural surface to the bottom of the grave and the grave will be mounded for settling to return to its natural state.
9. Grave markers are permitted but not required. Natural fieldstone, quarried stone or river rock may be used. Marble, granite and other impermeable rock/stone is not permitted. The grave marker must not be polished. Grave markers may not exceed approximately 18" x 18" inches and may not rest more than 3" above grade lying flat to the ground. No foundation is permitted. The Town shall not be responsible for damage to any markers.
10. No plantings, vases or potted plants are permitted. No artificial flowers or other decorations may be placed on graves. Natural wreaths and flowers are permitted provided that are rested on the ground directly in front of the marking or at the foot of the grave if no marker is used and do not contain and packaging, decorations, ribbons or the like. The Town of Montague shall not be liable for items left at a grave, or damage to any such items to weather, vandalism theft or wear and tear.
11. The cemetery adheres to sequential burial to minimize disturbance to the land, vegetation and graves. One may pre-purchase the right to be buried, however, the actual site is not assigned until the time of need. The location of the grave is at the discretion of the Cemetery Commission. Space may be saved so that partners may be buried in adjacent plots.
12. Only one body is allowed per gravesite. One cremation burial may be included in the same gravesite as one body.
13. Non-Montague residents are permitted to be buried in Highland Woods.
14. All graves are opened and filled-in by a paid contractor, unless family members or friends of the deceased elect to fill-in the grave.
15. Gravesite size is 4 feet x 8 feet.
16. This policy shall supersede all provisions of the Rules and Regulations of the Montague Cemetery Commission only with respect to so-called "Green Burials" or "Natural Burials". All other provisions of said Rules and Regulations shall apply in the Highland Woods Cemetery to the extent that they are not inconsistent with this Policy.

Wellfleet - <https://www.wellfleet-ma.gov/cemetery-commissioners>

10A. Green Burial shall mean a burial that allows the body to decompose naturally, returning all elements to the earth through environmentally sound practices. A Green Burial may incorporate the following essential elements: an un-embalmed body wrapped in a biodegradable shroud (cotton, wool, silk, hemp, etc.) and buried on a natural burial trundle (wooden tray with handles), or in a coffin made solely of biodegradable materials (cardboard, wood, willow, bamboo, seagrass, felt, etc.), or placed directly onto the earth without a trundle or a coffin.

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10B.Green burial graves shall be a minimum of 4 feet deep (to the bottom of the remains. Green Burials require a backfill height of 3-5 feet to allow for the natural settling of earth.

Wenham –

[https://cms4files1.revize.com/wenhamma/Wenham%20Cemetery%20Rules%20%20Regulations_16NOV2021_%20\(1\).pdf](https://cms4files1.revize.com/wenhamma/Wenham%20Cemetery%20Rules%20%20Regulations_16NOV2021_%20(1).pdf)

Green Burials, defined as a burial without embalming and not utilizing permanent vaults and/or caskets, SHALL be available only at Iron Rail Cemetery and SHALL be conducted only in accordance with any Massachusetts state regulations. Green burials SHALL use a shroud or biodegradable container. The burial SHALL be at a minimum depth of four feet. A flat marker of at least one foot square centered at the head of the burial SHALL be required if no permanent gravestone is being emplaced.

West Tisbury – [https://www.westtisbury-](https://www.westtisbury-ma.gov/sites/g/files/vyhlf8396/f/uploads/cemetery_rules_and_regulations_11-06-19.pdf)

[ma.gov/sites/g/files/vyhlf8396/f/uploads/cemetery_rules_and_regulations_11-06-19.pdf](https://www.westtisbury-ma.gov/sites/g/files/vyhlf8396/f/uploads/cemetery_rules_and_regulations_11-06-19.pdf)

In the case of a Green Burial, burial in a casket is not required. However if one is used, it must be of biodegradable material such as pine or cardboard.

viii. In the case of a Green Burial where vault/grave liner and possibly a casket may not be used, where ground subsidence issues and equipment access may be of concern, the Cemetery Commission reserves the right to restrict such burials to certain plots or a designated area of a town cemetery as the Cemetery Superintendent or Cemetery Commission deems necessary.

ix. In the case of Green Burials the body of the deceased is to be prepared in an environmentally friendly way; embalming is not permitted. Any clothing or shroud used to cover the body is to be of biodegradable material. Non-degradable objects may not be buried with the body.

x. In the case of Green Burials the body may be brought to the cemetery by an undertaker, or by family and friends of the deceased. A board and straps may be used to lower the body into the grave.

xi. In the case of Green Burials participation in preparation of the grave and in the burial of the body is subject to the approval of the Cemetery Superintendent.

xii. In the case of Green Burials burial will be at a depth of 4 feet. A stone marker not larger than nine inches by twelve inches, engraved with the deceased's name, and the year of birth and death, may be placed flat to the ground at the foot of the grave.

Westford – <https://www.westfordma.gov/DocumentCenter/View/11057/Green-Burial-Booklet-Final-4-12-22>

Green Burial in Westford

General Information and Guidelines

The Westford Cemetery Department offers the option for “green” or natural burial in a designated section at Pine Grove Cemetery. In a natural burial, a deceased person's body is not embalmed, and is laid to rest in a biodegradable shroud or casket. The grave is 3-4 feet deep, and no grave liner or vault is

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used or permitted. Graves are mounded and allowed to settle, and the native flora is maintained or restored. This section will be mown and landscaped somewhat differently than the rest of the cemetery, creating a more naturalistic appearance.

While today green burial may be considered a relatively new practice in the United States, nearly all burials were natural prior to the Civil War. Many people now choose green burial as a sustainable way of caring for the dead, as it promotes efficient decomposition, nourishes the soil, conserves natural resources, reduces carbon emissions, and restores and preserves native habitat. Some people choose natural burial for religious reasons. Others desire to reduce burial costs by making or purchasing a simple shroud or casket, and forgoing the purchase of embalming services and a grave liner or vault. To learn more about green burial, visit the Green Burial Massachusetts website:

<https://greenburialma.org/>

We offer the following guidelines for choosing a natural burial in Westford to help you plan ahead.

Choosing a Green Burial Lot

A green burial section at Pine Grove Cemetery has been developed with 148 lots. Please make an appointment with the Cemetery Department to view the site and purchase the lot(s) of your choice.

A printable price structure and information on “Burial Fees, Rights and Services” can be found on the Cemetery Department webpage on the Town website:

<https://westfordma.gov/1055/CemeteryDepartment>.

Requests for green burials outside the green burial section will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

Home Funerals and Conventional Funeral Home Options

Green burial is compatible with a myriad of funerary customs. Some people choose to hire a funeral director who is knowledgeable about green burial to prepare their loved one’s body and hold a service in a conventional funeral home.

Others choose a “home funeral” (also called a “home vigil” or “home wake”), in which the body of the deceased is kept at home – typically for 1-3 days – allowing family members and friends to gather and grieve together in a comfortable environment. Families who opt for home funerals may choose to take on the role of a funeral director, including preparing the body for vigil and burial, coordination of legal paperwork, obtaining the burial permit, holding a service, arranging the burial with the Cemetery Department, and transporting the body. A home funeral guide can assist families with this option. Some funeral directors are also willing to assist with a home funeral or assist with certain aspects while the family handles others. For example, the family may wish to prepare their loved one’s body for burial and arrange a vigil in the home, while hiring a funeral director only to handle the legal paperwork and transportation.

To learn more about home funerals, visit the National Home Funeral Alliance website:

<https://www.homefuneralalliance.org/>

To learn more about working without a funeral director, visit the Funeral Consumers Alliance of Eastern Massachusetts website: <https://fcaemass.org/resources/caring-for-your-own-dead/>

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Whether you opt for a home funeral or a more conventional arrangement with a funeral director, all applicable state laws must be followed. Pre-planning, when possible, is always advised.

Preparing the Body for Natural Burial

Any clothing, jewelry, or adornment to be interred with the body must be made of natural, biodegradable material.

It is important to keep the body cool to slow decomposition. There are simple methods for this to be done at home, such as the use of Techni-Ice packs or a similar cooling product. Many funeral homes have onsite refrigeration or use other cooling techniques. We recommend discussing this with a home funeral guide or funeral director. Caskets and shrouds must be free of visible bodily fluids upon arrival at the cemetery.

Shrouds and Shrouding Boards

A shroud is a cloth used to wrap and cover a body after a person has died. Green burial shrouds must be made of natural, biodegradable materials such as wool, cotton, linen, bamboo, or hemp. A shrouded body may be placed inside a biodegradable casket, but a casket is not required. A shrouded body without a casket must be entirely wrapped and placed on an untreated softwood (such as white pine) or wicker shrouding board, which meets the same biodegradability requirements as caskets (see below).

The board will help stabilize the body while being transported and lowered into the grave and will remain inside the grave. Plywood and particle board are not acceptable. A board with carrying handles that is at least as wide and as long as the body is recommended; please notify the Cemetery Department if a board will exceed 28-inches in width and 84-inches in length. Some shrouds have carrying handles sewn into the cloth and sleeves sewn into the bottom in which a narrower board can be inserted; the narrower board is acceptable since the body and board are held snugly together with ties, providing stability.

Caskets

Caskets may be constructed from untreated softwood, wicker, cardboard, or other natural, biodegradable materials, and must not be painted with toxic paint or varnish. They should be of sufficient strength to support the weight of the body. Wooden caskets should be held together with wooden dowels and non-toxic glues rather than metal fasteners. To minimize environmental impact, we recommend obtaining locally-made caskets. Some people prefer to make their own, using locally-sourced or repurposed materials. Handmade caskets should conform to standard casket size; please notify the Cemetery Department if an oversized casket will be required.

The Green Burial Process

One full body burial is allowed in each green burial grave.

Families or funeral directors planning a natural burial must arrange for at least six people to be present at the cemetery who can safely lift and carry the shrouded body or casket a maximum of 100 feet from the vehicle to the gravesite. These individuals may also lower the body into the grave, if pre-arranged with the Cemetery Department; otherwise, a mechanical lowering device will be used.

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Graves will be opened by cemetery personnel. Families and friends are welcome to help fill the graves after the body is lowered using shovels provided by the Cemetery Department. Personnel will complete the burial after the family departs. Cut flowers may be placed in and on top of the grave.

Perpetual Care of Natural Graves

Once a green burial grave is closed, the soil will be mounded, mulched, and allowed to settle, which could take a few weeks or several months. In keeping with green burial principals of sustainability and habitat preservation, cemetery personnel will re-seed or plant settled graves with native plant vegetation. No other plantings are allowed. Flower vases and decorations are not permitted in this section.

Memorialization

Upright headstones are not permitted on natural burial graves. Individual grave markers placed flush with the ground are permitted if desired, but not required. Markers must be flat, no larger than 2' W x 1' L, a minimum of 4" thick, and made of unpolished, locally-sourced, natural or quarried stone. Engraving of markers is permitted prior to placement. The Cemetery Department reserves the right to remove any marker that does not comply.

A Monument Permit Application must be submitted and approved by the Cemetery Department prior to placement of any marker. The monument company of your choice will have this form or it can be obtained from the Cemetery Department office or webpage by clicking [here](#).

Another option for memorialization is to have the decedent's name, year of birth, and year of death engraved on a large, granite, shared memorial stone that is situated in the natural burial area and owned by the cemetery. For more information about this option, please contact the Cemetery Department.

The Town of Westford Regulations for Municipal Cemeteries is available on the Westford Cemetery Department webpage by clicking [here](#) and at the Westford Cemetery Office.

Westford Cemetery Department personnel are committed to serving the community and visitors to our cemeteries. We are dedicated to maintaining and preserving our cemeteries and looking after the final resting places of our beloved departed citizens entrusted to our care. Please contact us if you need assistance, have any questions about green burials, or are interested in purchasing a green burial lot.

Worthington – <https://worthington-ma.us/municipal-directory/cemetery-commissioners/>

Rules for Green Burials:

Open to anyone—not just town residents

Available in any cemetery where plots are available (North and Ringville) and in any plot that has been purchased but not used

Burial will be in whatever shroud or biodegradable container the family chooses

The burial will be at a depth of four feet

A permanent flat marker of at least one foot by one foot centered and at the head of the burial is required

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