

What is a *green* funeral?

Many of us think of a 'green' funeral as a burial in a woodland or meadowland burial site, using a cardboard or wicker coffin, but there are many aspects that can be considered when planning a funeral to be as environmentally friendly as possible. This leaflet is intended to encourage a broader view of the term 'Green Funeral' and briefly look at some of the issues that can be considered in taking an environmentally aware approach to funeral arrangements.

Green burial grounds

Woodland and meadowland burial grounds are intended to benefit the environment by providing valuable 'natural' habitats for wildlife and are managed without the use of chemical weed killers and fertilisers. The funeral itself will generally include the planting of a tree or wildflowers, with every funeral further enhancing the habitat.

It can often be forgotten that many urban cemeteries, as well as providing valuable wildlife habitat, may also be managed as far as possible without the use of chemicals and increasingly, may incorporate areas where maintenance is reduced to allow the natural habitat to develop further.

Going Green

Every aspect of the funeral arrangements can make a difference to

how environmentally friendly the funeral is, the timing, location, floral tributes, the way a cemetery or crematorium is managed – even the choice of memorial can affect its environmental impact.

Embalming

Also known as 'hygienic treatment' the process replaces blood with embalming fluids. Even when the most environmentally friendly embalming fluids (derived from seaweed) are used, the disposal of up to four litres of blood is required – usually directly into the public sewer, increasing the resources needed for water treatment.

Timing

Usually, the deceased will be kept refrigerated before the funeral, so the longer the interval between the death and the funeral, the more energy will be used to maintain the refrigerated environment.

Choice of Coffin

A wide range of coffins and caskets are available, from the large 'American Caskets', which can be made from rainforest timber or metal, to locally made coffins using renewable, local resources. Apart from the environmental credentials of the materials used to make the coffin, the distance those materials and the coffin itself have travelled might also influence the decision about the type of coffin preferred.

Floral Tributes

The concept of 'food miles' is becoming increasingly well publicised, and the same principles can be applied to cut flowers.

Floral tributes can also incorporate plastic frames, floristry foam, cellophane/plastic wrapping and synthetic tapes, ribbons and other decorative items.

Composting and recycling can help to reduce the environmental impact of floral tributes and used floristry foam can be crumbled and mixed with compost to help retain moisture in hanging baskets and planters.

Burial or Cremation

Many different factors affect the environmental impact of burial and cremation. While burial is generally accepted as 'greener' with regard to emissions and energy use, ground conditions, mechanical excavation and the maintenance of the cemetery can also be taken into account when assessing environmental impact.

