



BURIAL OR CREMATION?

LEARN ABOUT FUNERAL SERVICE OPTIONS





BURIAL OR CREMATION?

Most Americans today can tell you exactly where their grandparents are buried. That is because most of our grandparents were buried within a few miles of where they were born, went to grade school, met and married the boy or girl of their dreams, and raised their family.

We have become increasingly more mobile over the last few decades. Many of us did not marry someone we knew in high school, and our children may have been born and raised in multiple states. Things have changed, and those things have impacted our traditions surrounding death.

In the last twenty years, we have seen an increase in the number of people choosing cremation instead of burial. Today in the United States, about half of us choose burial and the other half elect to be cremated. As a result, our grandchildren may have a different answer about the location of our final resting place. It's up to us to decide if it is important that they know where we rest.

There is no right or wrong option. Both burial and cremation achieve the same end. They respectfully dispose of a dead human body. It's a matter of personal choice. This paper is meant to provide information to help you sort out which method of final disposition will work best for you and your family.



“REMEMBER, MAN, THAT THOU ARE DUST AND TO DUST THOU SHALL RETURN ...”



HOW LONG DOES IT TAKE FOR A BODY TO RETURN TO DUST?

Burial – It can take as long as fifty years or more for a buried human body to completely decompose to skeletal form. Many factors impact the rate of decomposition. Embalming slows decomposition. The material the casket is made of will play a part. Hardwoods deteriorate slower than soft woods, thicker metals last longer than thin metals. Caskets made of bronze, copper, and stainless steel are slower to decompose than carbon steel. In the same way, if the casket is placed in a vault, the material the vault is made of will impact decomposition. Other factors that affect the rate of decomposition are the depth of the burial and the soil composition. It is not possible to predict how long a body will remain intact after burial. However, it is safe to say burial is a slower way to become dust.

Cremation – Cremation, on the other hand, is much faster. It takes on average between one and three hours to cremate one body. Factors that contribute to the time needed to complete cremation include:

1. The weight of the person being cremated.
2. The fat-to-lean ratio of the body mass of the person being cremated.
3. The material used to fabricate the container the person is in when placed in the chamber.
4. The temperature of the cremation chamber.
5. The design of the cremation chamber. Once again, there is no right or wrong, just different and a matter of personal preference.

HOW DOES BURIAL WORK?



The Grave Space

An individual wishing to be buried will purchase a space, also called a burial plot, in a cemetery or memorial garden. The space can be purchased after death has occurred or well in advance of death. Cemeteries typically allow a variety of choices for a family to mark the grave. A memorial garden most often will allow only flat markers. The goal of the garden is to maintain a peaceful, pastoral setting. Both cemeteries and memorial gardens will often have “features.”

These might be natural. For example, a pond or a special grove of trees might be a desirable natural feature. Features may also take the form of artistic sculptures or designs. The price of the grave space will reflect the location.

A plot near a feature or with a desirable view will come at a higher cost. Burial sites are most often sold as single plots used for one burial or double plots where two people can be buried.

What Costs will I Incur if I am Buried?

1. Cost of the space.
2. Opening and closing of the grave.
3. A casket.
4. A vault or grave liner.
5. A marker.
6. There may also be burial permit fees required by the county or by the state.



HOW DOES BURIAL WORK?



Cemetery Rules

When purchasing a grave space, you should ask about rules and requirements. Most cemeteries require the use of a grave liner or vault. The casket is placed in the vault or liner at the cemetery.

These are necessary to protect the integrity of the land and prevent damage to the casket as the equipment that is needed to maintain the cemetery passes over the grave. Liners and vaults vary in price based on the material from which they are made. They can be purchased from your funeral home.

Most cemeteries will also have rules about what can be placed on or near a grave. There will be rules regarding size of the monument, extra ornaments that can be placed near the grave, and how long sprays and flowers will be permitted to remain on the grave.

You may also be required to pay a fee for perpetual care. Perpetual Care is the term used to describe the continual maintenance of the cemetery property. Most states have laws that require cemeteries be maintained in the future. These rules and state laws that protect cemeteries help families feel confident that their loved one's final resting place is indeed final.



HOW DOES CREMATION WORK?



The Process

During the cremation process, the body is reduced to its basic elements: bone fragments and ash. The resulting product is referred to as cremains. Cremains will also include the remains of the container. Once cremation is complete, the dried bone fragments are processed in a machine called a cremulator. The cremulator breaks down larger pieces of bone. When the process is complete there will be between three and seven pounds of white substance that resembles coarse sand. The remains will then be packaged or placed in an urn according to the family's request.

Where do Cremations Take Place?

A crematory can be a separate, free-standing facility or a part of a funeral home. Crematories are regulated by the state. Some states do not allow a funeral home to operate a crematory, and in other states, nearly all crematories are in licensed funeral homes. In some areas of the United States, cemeteries may also preform cremations. When making arrangements that include cremation, you should ask where the cremation will take place.

What costs are associated with cremation?

1. There will be a fee for the cremation process.
2. There will be a cost for a cremation container.
3. If refrigerated storage of the body is required, there will be a fee.
4. There may also be cremation permit fees paid to the county or state.



FAITH AND THE CREMATION OR BURIAL DECISION



For some, cremation is part of their religious practice. For others, cremation is forbidden by their religion.

When making your funeral plans, check with your funeral director, priest, minister, rabbi, or other clergy to determine how to fit cremation or burial with your faith.

Christianity does not prefer or forbid cremation.

Protestantism is neutral regarding cremation.

Catholicism permits cremation but prefers the body to be present during religious services and cremated after service.

Judaism, Jewish law forbids cremation; however, some modern reform Jewish sects allow cremation.

Hinduism mandates cremation.

Buddhism embraces cremation.

Greek Orthodox strongly opposes cremation.

Muslims forbid cremation.



A FINAL RESTING PLACE



Burial

When a body is buried, there is truly a final resting place. Only on very rare occasions do families exhume and move a buried family member. Generations who follow know where their ancestor is buried. Even when the location becomes blurred or unsure, finding a buried ancestor is a fairly straightforward endeavor. Many family members are comforted by having a place to visit. They go to the cemetery on birthdays, holidays, and when they just want to feel close to the person they loved. Cemeteries can be very comforting. Caring for the grave and having a “talk” with the deceased can be very helpful as a people processes their grief.

Cremation

Cremated remains can always be buried, providing a permanent resting place. Cremains can be buried in their own plot or many cemeteries will allow two cremains to be buried in one burial space. Most cemeteries will allow one container of cremated remains to be buried in a grave space with a fully casketed body. The cost of opening and closing the grave will need to be paid and an urn vault is usually required, but being buried with a family member can save cost.

Other permanent options include having the urn placed in a columbarium niche. Most cemeteries have a columbarium. Cremains can also be scattered. Many churches, historical sites, and cemeteries have scattering gardens. Often there is a place where the name and date of death can be inscribed on a plaque or memorial brick near the garden.



A FINAL RESTING PLACE



Cremation

Scattering on private property is a legal option, but there is no guarantee of permanence. If the property changes hands or use, the resting place can be altered or even destroyed. This can be unsettling for family members. As an example, if grandmother's ashes were incorporated into her beloved rose garden, that lovely memory can be upset if the home is sold and the rose garden removed to make way for the new owner's swimming pool. The same holds true for any scattering on public property, parks, golf courses and the like. In addition, scattering on public land without permission is not usually legal.

Cremains can also be retained by a family member. There are thousands of lovely urns, wind chimes, garden benches, and the like available for the purpose. Small amounts of ashes can also be incorporated in jewelry for both women and men. That is a good way to add an element of permanence when cremains are scattered. Cremation presents many different opportunities for a final resting place and, as a result, requires more thought and decision-making than many people expect. Sadly, the consideration of a final resting place for the ashes is often overlooked. That leaves a problem for someone down the line and should be avoided.



FUNERAL SERVICE OPTIONS



What Are my Options for Services?

Disposition (burial or cremation) does not have any impact on funeral service options. Both burial and cremation can take place before or after a service is held.

The service may include visitation with the body present or, if the family prefers, there can be a private viewing of the body for close family members or no viewing at all.

The service may or may not be faith-based. The service may include music, pictures, and food. It may be a celebration of the life. The service may be held in a church, funeral home, or another location. It can be formal or casual.

What if one Spouse Prefers Cremation and the Other Prefers Burial?

Each can have what they prefer. Talk to your funeral director about your options. Remember, both cremated remains and a casketed body can be buried at different times in a grave space.



FUNERAL SERVICE OPTIONS



What Should be Considered in Making the Decision?

- How long have you lived in the area?
- Do you have family members nearby?
- What is your family tradition burial or cremation?
- Would a change be difficult for your loved ones?
- Is there a location that is meaningful to your family?
- What works best with your faith?
- If you are a part of a couple, does either party have a fear or ick factor with either form of disposition?

Most funeral homes have a person on staff who will meet with you, answer all of your questions, and help you determine what will work best for you and the people who are important to you. Amazingly enough, this is a free service.

QUESTIONS? GIVE US A CALL ANYTIME

1-707-462-6711

