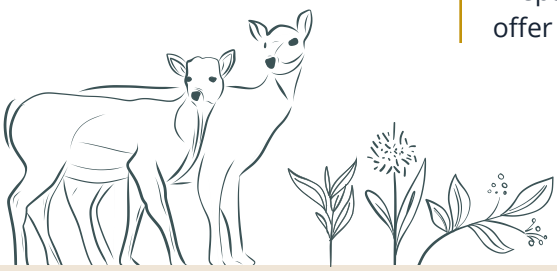
# A Planning Guide for a green goodbye.

**You may be certain you'd like to be buried naturally, but uncertain of your next steps. Whether you're young or old, in good health or not, natural burial isn't in the mainstream (yet!) so it takes some planning.**

## Share your wishes

Tell your family and/or friends that you would like a natural burial. Though sometimes uncomfortable, this conversation will ultimately ease them of the stress of making these decisions for you, and everyone will be comforted knowing that your wishes will be honoured, especially when your wishes benefit the earth.

Consider who you trust to put your plans into action. Once you die, the power to make your funeral and burial arrangements will go to the executor of your will (if you have one) or your legal next of kin. Make sure this individual knows of your plans, and where to find your written instructions.



## You can plan ahead without paying ahead

Natural burials are not yet widely accessible across Canada and you may be disappointed by your current options. There may not be a natural burial ground near you, or there is, but it's small and attached to a conventional cemetery (known as a "hybrid"). Instead, you envision an expansive natural burial park in the countryside (known as a "stand-alone").

If you are anticipating the need for a burial in the near future, you may want to finalize details with a cemetery now. Otherwise, don't feel pressured to sign a contract for a cemetery plot or funeral arrangement that you are not completely satisfied with. Prepaid arrangements typically offer financial merits only when they are made many years before a death, but if they are made 20+ years in advance, a person's preferences may change. Instead, write down your desires based upon what is available now, and update your plans as other options become available. Instead of pre-paying, consider setting aside (or investing) funds for your

## What if you've pre-paid for something you don't want?

You may have pre-paid for a cremation or conventional burial, and now that you know about natural burial, you'd like to switch. Usually, you can get a refund, but not the whole amount. The best bet is to check with the Bereavement Authority of Ontario (www.thebao.ca). Their job is to protect the consumer.

# Finding natural burial grounds

**It's tricky to commit today if your ideal natural burial ground doesn't yet exist in your community. If you'd like a green goodbye, here are all the potential options.**

## Stand-alone natural burial ground

### Here's what it looks like

Acres upon acres of natural landscape, usually in the countryside, either meadow or forest.

### What to do

A lot of people dream of this. It should be available in Ontario soon, but let your family know this is your ideal and stay in touch with us so you hear of new sites.

## Hybrid natural burial

### Here's what it looks like

A section of a conventional cemetery that has been created to be a natural burial area. Keep checking our website. We post each time a hybrid launches.

### What to do

There may be a hybrid cemetery near you. If not, ask yourself if you would be willing to be buried outside your community. Cemeteries are often accustomed to serving families from other parts of the province. (Note that funeral homes will charge by the kilometre for distanced burials.) This may be your default until a stand-alone or hybrid burial ground opens in your area.

## A natural burial, but not in a natural burial ground

### Here's what it looks like

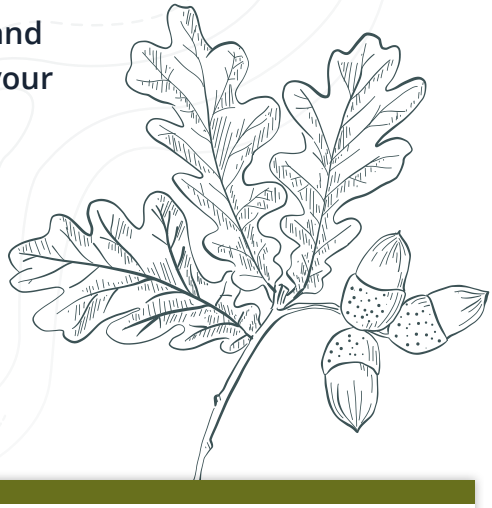
By law, cemeteries must offer plots that don't insist on an outer burial container or "vault". Although these cemeteries don't make strides towards conservation, this doesn't mean you should write them off. If there are no natural burial grounds nearby, or if you'd prefer to be buried locally, these plots are a greener alternative to cremation or conventional burial. By not embalming, and choosing a biodegradable casket and a modest marker, your final exit is gentle to the planet, and when you purchase one of these plots, you show the cemetery that there is public interest in natural alternatives.

### What to do

Ask your local cemeteries about their accommodations for a greener goodbye, and find a funeral home that carries biodegradable caskets or approves your own.

# Components of a natural burial

**Familiarize yourself with the components of a natural burial, and plan to coordinate a burial that is as natural as possible with your local cemetery and/or funeral home.**



## The body cannot be embalmed.

- Funeral homes may offer embalming with “green” embalming fluid. We recommend foregoing an embalming procedure altogether. This way your body can nourish the earth that fed it through life.

## There’s no concrete.

- If there isn’t a natural burial ground, ensure your chosen cemetery directs you to the plots that don’t require an outer burial container surrounding the casket (a “vault”).
- Rather than a traditional headstone, the grave is marked by a communal marker, a GPS coordinate, or a modest marker such as locally sourced stone.

## The body will rest in a biodegradable shroud or casket.

- Some casket companies offer natural options. Ask the cemetery or funeral home what natural alternatives they offer.
- If you know anyone experienced with woodworking, constructing a burial container adds that personal touch.
- If you’re leaning towards a burial shroud instead of a container, check with your chosen cemetery to ensure they allow shrouds.

## Above ground the natural eco-system is restored.

- If you are seeking a natural burial at a conventional cemetery, they may insist on chemicals to maintain their lawn, but under the earth you are all natural.

# Potential roadblocks

### Winter burials

Unfortunately, many rural cemeteries do not offer burials during the winter. Some may offer to care for the body on site until the spring, but others may not. Efforts are currently underway to make winter burials more widely accessible.

### Viewing the body

Many people worry about viewing a loved one when they have not been embalmed. Some funeral homes will inflate these worries by exaggerating the problems that can accompany natural dead bodies. Embalming is not legally required in Ontario, and a family can view a body without it. If you are using a funeral home, request that they forego embalming, and instead perform a "minimal preparation". This is where they wash and dress the body, and close the eyes and mouth.

There are time constraints that come with an unembalmed body. Without refrigeration, a body can begin to decompose after a few days. With refrigeration, there is more time (about a week or so), but every body is different. Unfortunately, some funeral homes do not have a cold place to preserve the body. Advance research will help you find the funeral home best suited to support a natural burial.

# Ceremonies around natural burial

**Just like any burial, you can have the entire ceremony with all the guests at the natural burial ground, or you can have an intimate burial and a ceremony elsewhere, on the same day or not.**

Imagine paying tribute to a loved one surrounded by nature. It sets the stage for ceremonies that are especially touching. Families who bury naturally often see it as an opportunity to participate in services and rituals that are uniquely meaningful to the person who has died. They take a more hands-on approach to the burial, like helping to lower the casket into the ground, filling the grave with soil, placing flowers with the body, or even writing loving messages on the burial container (this is especially great for kids). The setting replaces the rigidity of a conventional burial with something that feels special for everyone involved.

## Ways to initiate the conversation

Natural burial may appeal to you because it's carbon neutral (unlike cremation), your final rest will be among nature, you'll give back to the earth that fed you in life, and/or because of its potential conservational benefits. Despite all its assets, natural burial may be a difficult topic to broach to your family. Some people believe it to be illegal, while others simply avoid any conversations regarding death. It may be gentler to initiate an environmental discussion that morphs into one about natural burial. You never know, your family may love the idea as much as you do!

## Tips on Funeral Homes

### Funeral homes range greatly in price and services offered.

Do your research to determine which one suits you. If you choose to speak to one directly, know that they may be persistent. Ask them clearly for the information you need, and do not give them your personal information unless you want to.

### Don't let a funeral director pressure you into embalming.

Instead, ask them for a "minimal preparation" where they close the eyes and mouth of the body. Depending on the circumstances of the death, the funeral director may warn you that the body is not viewable without embalming (if there was an autopsy, for example.) If you would like to view the body, ask them to do their best without embalming. If you are concerned about the appearance of the body, appoint a friend of the family to be the first to look. If there has been significant decomposition, a viewing is not recommended.

### You don't need to purchase a "funeral" from a funeral home.

You can simply use their services for the basics: filing paperwork, transportation of the body, a burial container, and if you like, facilities for a small viewing with family.

### You may provide your own casket, however it may be refused.

Funeral homes and cemeteries have the right to refuse a casket. If you plan on using a homemade container, or one that's been purchased elsewhere, make sure in advance that they will accept it. If they do, they'll outline requirements it must meet.

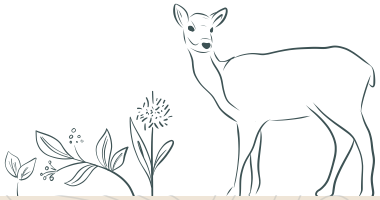
### You can use a funeral home that isn't local if it suits your needs.

Most funeral homes now allow families to make arrangements remotely, and if they're nearby a natural burial ground, they will often have greener options and wholeheartedly embrace your decision to have a green goodbye.

### You may prefer to side-step a funeral home altogether.

This is completely legal and possible, but we recommend you plan this in advance and discuss it with your loved ones. Here's a good place to start www.communitydeathcare.ca

**We hope this guide is helpful. Please share it and sign up for our e-news so you know when a natural burial ground opens near you.**



**www.naturalburialassociation.ca**

Natural Burial Association is a non-profit with a mission to create natural burial grounds in Ontario.



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