

## Go Green When It's Your Time to Go

**M**ANY OF US go to great lengths to live in an environmentally conscious way. We drive hybrid cars, use energy-efficient light bulbs and buy locally grown produce from farmers' markets. Now, thanks to a growing "green burial" movement, our conservation efforts don't have to end when we die.

People who opt for green burial forgo chemical embalming fluids and choose caskets made from biodegradable materials such as wicker or bamboo or simple cloth shrouds. They can also be laid to rest in green cemeteries that don't require concrete vaults, which are used primarily to keep the ground level for mowing, says Joe Sehee, the executive director of the Green Burial Council ([www.greenburialcouncil.org](http://www.greenburialcouncil.org)), a Santa Fe, N.M.-based nonprofit that promotes awareness about environmentally friendly burial practices and provides certifications to green funeral vendors and cemeteries.

Sehee says the amount of energy used in traditional burials—with their chemicals, wood, concrete and metal—is "pretty staggering." He says an increasing number of people are interested in planning alternative burials that are aligned with their eco-friendly values. "Baby boomers will really be the driving force here," Sehee says. "I don't think people who are recycling grocery bags are going to spend a lot of money on a box that gets buried."

Patsy Murray, 69, a retired life coach, says she has been concerned with conservation for many years. When she retired in Gainesville, Fla., Murray replaced the grass in her yard with native flowers and vegetation. "I've always been very aware of trying to save our natural resources," she says. That, Murray says, is why she's dictated in her will that she'd like to be buried at Prairie Creek Conservation Cemetery ([www.conservationburialinc.org](http://www.conservationburialinc.org)), located outside Gainesville.

### From Ashes to Ashes—Faster

Prairie Creek Director Freddie Johnson says his cemetery doesn't use embalming or concrete vaults, and buries people in biodegradable containers or shrouds. Instead of manicured lawns, there are grassy meadows and indigenous Florida oak trees. The cemetery lies in a protected conservation area overseen by a trust. "When you look across the landscape, you don't see markers, monuments or headstones sticking up in



the land," Johnson says. "You will find a gravesite by a mound of leaves or natural material."

If you're not near a conservation or other natural burial cemetery, you may be able to find a traditional cemetery that devotes a portion of its grounds to natural burial. At such hybrid cemeteries, vaults and embalming typically are not required and biodegradable caskets are permitted. "We call it 'shades of green,'" says Jim Olson, a Wisconsin funeral director and spokesperson for the National Funeral Directors Association ([www.nfda.org](http://www.nfda.org)). Half of the 40 cemeteries in the Green Burial Council's network are hybrids.

If a local funeral home or cemetery that you'd like to use doesn't have a natural burial section, ask if you can incorporate some green elements. Olson says refrigeration of your body is a preservation alternative to embalming, which is a cancer risk to funeral directors. He also says you can choose a greener casket made of natural materials such as sea grass, which will decompose faster than wood or metal.

You can ask the funeral home to order a green casket if it doesn't carry them. The Green Burial Council has a directory on its Web site where you can search for environmentally conscious vendors and funeral homes.

With a green funeral, you may be able to save some cash as well as the planet. The cost of a simple burial at Prairie Creek costs \$2,000. Compare that with \$7,755, which was the average cost of a U.S. funeral in 2009, the most recent year for which data is available, according to the funeral directors' group. Still, if you opt for a natural burial, you may incur additional expenses such as transportation to a green cemetery or the shipment of a natural casket. **K** —MEGHAN STREIT