

Making Ripples

Discover Green Cemeteries for Earth Day

by Amanda Bancroft

Earth Day is a popular time to “green” our lives, but there is also the option of a green death. The Natural State Burial Association offers education about green cemeteries. Their slogans are not at all morbid: “Be a Tree!” “Future Compost” and “Recycle Yourself!” humorously remind us that our very selves are not unlike kitchen scraps nourishing the garden in our backyards.

The organization is now a registered 501©3 non-profit, accepts tax-deductible donations and hopes to establish a green cemetery in Northwest Arkansas. According to their website, their mission is to “provide environmentally-sound burial and diverse memorial options through the founding and operating of cemeteries designed to conserve natural landscape.” Founder and director Vicki Kelley explains that “Green burial is traditional burial (think great-grandparents, pioneers, pre-civil war). Conventional burial is the product of today’s funeral industry.”

Within a green cemetery, visitors rely on GPS coordinates rather than monuments to find grave sites. Chemicals, herbicides, and pesticides are not allowed. Instead of embalming and caskets, there is a simple biodegradable burial container made of cloth, wicker, cardboard, or pine. Even though the cemetery is diligently cared for, lawns are not created. Instead, families are encouraged to plant native flowers, shrubs and trees that welcome our indigenous species and create a thriving native ecosystem. It’s a more environmentally sound option than cremation, because it doesn’t consume energy or release pollutants into the atmosphere the way cremation can. Green burials are more affordable because fewer materials and services are bought (cost varies depending on a family’s various decisions).

The Natural State Burial Association is actively seeking property and needs help from the public to create Arkansas’ first Natural Cemetery. They need around twenty acres outside of designated municipal boundaries within Northwest Arkansas. The property may be adjacent to an existing cemetery. Donations of money or space for a cemetery are both welcome. The NSBA hopes residents will have local green burial options once a cemetery can be created. The Green Burial Council has three levels of certification for green cemeteries: Hybrid, Natural, and Conservation, each with increasing standards. Hybrids are conventional cemeteries with land set aside for green burials. Natural burial grounds allow only green burial practices. Conservation burial grounds meet the criteria of natural grounds, but guarantee long-term protection of the property through a conservation easement held by an organization

Funeral requirements vary by state, so be aware of legal differences if your loved ones live elsewhere. For more information about home funerals, which are legal in every state, visit HomeFuneralAlliance.org. Have questions about our local options? Know of available land for a

Northwest Arkansas green cemetery? Email GreenBurialNSBA@Gmail.com or call Cindy Jones at (479) 640-7709. Visit their website at NaturalStateBurialAssociation.org and connect on Facebook.

Amanda Bancroft is a writer, artist, and naturalist building an off-grid cottage for land conservation on Mt. Kessler. She and her husband Ryan blog about their adventures and offer a solar-hosted online educational center on how to make a difference with everyday choices at: www.RipplesBlog.org.