



## Big Green Idea Sheet: Green Funerals?

***'In this world nothing is certain but death and taxes.'* Benjamin Franklin.**

It is an absolute fact that we will all have to have a funeral one day and possibly organise the funeral of a loved one.

Many people are now taking responsibility for the overall organisation of the event and relying less on the larger organisations who offer a 'one stop shop' facility.

More and more people are considering different sorts of funeral as an alternative to traditional religious services and cremations, often in search of a more personal expression designed to reflect the individuality of the deceased. Many also want a greener, more environmentally sound event.

With an increasing awareness of the environmental implications of burials and cremations, woodland burials are becoming more popular.

It is now possible to arrange some aspects of the burial yourself, but it requires a degree of courage, planning and determination to undertake a complete D-I-Y funeral.

A death certificate signed by a doctor and a certificate for burial from the registrar of deaths will be required if you are planning most of your own arrangements. However, if you are planning a private burial - which includes those not in a churchyard or cemetery - you must first register your intention of doing so. It is advisable to consult both the Environment Agency and the local council environmental health department about possible pollution of water courses.

### **Burial on Private Land**

The burial of Princess Diana in the grounds at Althorp drew attention to the idea of being buried at home. Other household names such as Barbara Cartland and Johnny Morris have also chosen to be buried in the grounds of their own homes.

However if you are planning an interment of this type then a number of local authority permissions will need to be granted.

Even if you own the land concerned, you must check the deeds to ensure there are no restrictions on what the property may be used for. Although planning permission is not strictly necessary if you own the freehold, it is advisable to consult the local planning office and environmental health department who will want to ensure that the local water table will not be affected. It seems that if this is the desired choice, then you should talk to the appropriate authorities well in advance.

A burial at home is also likely to bring down the value of your home, possibly by up to 25 per cent. It is also worth bearing in mind the possible emotional and practical difficulties presented by moving house. Once remains have been buried, they may not be disturbed or removed without authority. Your family will have to face leaving the grave behind or else apply for a Home Office licence for exhumation.

A record of the burial should be made and kept with the deeds or other relevant documents relating to the land.

An alternative to burial is to scatter or bury the ashes from a cremation in the garden. Technically ashes that are buried are still subject to exhumation laws, but obviously it is much easier to move them if required.

### **'Green' Funerals - Woodland or Nature Reserve Burial Grounds**

'Green burials' are becoming increasingly popular and there are a number of commercial sites opening around the country, promoting eco-friendly funerals and more informal ceremonies. These are often in woodland or nature reserve burial grounds of which there are currently about 50 already open in the UK, with at least another 50 applying for planning permission.

The Natural Death Centre has researched the laws and regulations for the UK

Find out more: To find out more about the Big Green Idea, and to share your ideas and experiences, visit [www.itsnoteasybeinggreen.org](http://www.itsnoteasybeinggreen.org)



## Big Green Idea Sheet: Green Funerals?

surrounding burial on farmland and in large private gardens and recent cases have confirmed that no planning permission is required for 'a limited number of unmarked and unfenced graves'.

At woodland burial grounds relatives may be able to plant a tree to mark the site either on or near the grave. At nature reserve burial grounds, which can be wild flower meadows or pastures, graves are either unmarked or may be marked by a small wooden plaque that will rot away naturally, and bulbs and flowers can be planted.

For those not using undertakers, cardboard and wooden coffins are obtainable, as well as woollen shrouds. However, an increasing number of undertakers will offer assistance with a woodland burial, such as providing cardboard coffins and transport of the body.

A list of woodland burial grounds is available from the Natural Death Centre.

The Natural Death Centre is an educational charity dedicated to supporting those dying at home and providing a movement to parallel the natural birth movement, including acting for the consumer. It produces its own handbook, *The Natural Death Handbook* (4th edition, £15.50 inc p&p), which offers advice on all areas of organising a 'green burial' as well as aspects such as living wills. It also offers a good funeral guide, listing good funeral directors and good crematoria and cemeteries.

### The Natural Death Centre

12a Blackstock Mews

Blackstock Road

London

N4 2BT

Helpline (10am-2pm Mon-Fri): 0871 288 2098

Email: [ndc@alberryfoundation.org](mailto:ndc@alberryfoundation.org)

<http://www.naturaldeath.org.uk>

### D-I-Y Funerals

An increasing number of undertakers will offer advice (usually at an hourly rate) about organising a D-I-Y funeral. Alternatively, see *The Natural Death Handbook* for detailed information and advice on how to organise a completely D-I-Y funeral.

### Burial at Sea

In the UK about 20 burials take place at sea each year. For a licence apply to the marine licensing person at the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (MAFF) on 020 238 5869 or contact your local Fisheries District Inspector. The licence is free, but there are a large number of bureaucratic guidelines to discourage it.

If a sea burial is planned, you should tell the registrar when registering the death, so that a 'Coroners Out of England Form' (Form 104) and the local coroner's address to which it should be sent can be obtained from the registrar.

### Future Reference

[http://www.funeralassist.co.uk/Eco\\_Coffins\\_Woodland\\_Burial\\_Sites.htm](http://www.funeralassist.co.uk/Eco_Coffins_Woodland_Burial_Sites.htm)

Carries a small list for environmentally friendly coffins, from wicker or cardboard, to bamboo or pine.

<http://www.eco-coffin.co.uk/>

Details of various designs of cardboard eco-coffins.

<http://www.ecopod.co.uk/>

Beautiful, organically shaped alternative 'coffins' crafted from naturally hardened 100% recycled paper.

Find out more: To find out more about the Big Green Idea, and to share your ideas and experiences, visit [www.itsnoteasybeinggreen.org](http://www.itsnoteasybeinggreen.org)