

## Greensprings FAQ

Your 15-ft x 15-ft lots are much larger than lots at conventional cemeteries. How many people can be buried in each?

Actually, you can bury only one person per site. Given our costs and overhead, our "one per site" rule helps us meet our conservation mission. Note: you may bury one set of cremated remains along with a standard, full-body burial on a 15-ft x 15-ft site.

What about winter burials?

If deep snow is on the ground, we suggest you trade your lot for one in our winter burial area. Otherwise we must charge you the extra cost of accessing the lot. Our "frost remover" fueled by a propane heater, allows us to thaw and dry frozen ground for digging. Even so, by cemetery law and our concern for the safety of our contractors, we may be unable to bury under severe weather conditions.

May families and friends dig a grave at Greensprings?

Unfortunately, no—the soil is dense, stony, and really hard to dig. You may find it meaningful to help close in the grave after the burial. (We'll provide the shovels.)

May we bury cremated remains at Greensprings? What about scattering ashes?

We offer 7 ½-ft x 7 ½-ft sites for cremated burials. You may bury one person's remains on that site. And yes, you may scatter ashes in the woods or meadows at Greensprings. Please don't scatter ashes in burial areas. We ask for a \$250 donation.

Tell me about planting a tree on my grave.

Actually, that's only an option in certain areas at Greensprings. When we began Greensprings, we wanted everyone to have that choice. But now we've learned that it's not that simple. Neighboring sites may have burials that happen years or even decades apart. Young trees could be damaged when a neighboring grave is dug, or mature roots of older trees could make digging the grave difficult while making it possible for a pallbearer to lose their footing.

For people who buy several sites together, who want to be buried next to their loved ones—or for those who are buried in our winter burial areas—plantings need to be of native grasses, herbs, and wildflowers or low shrubs. We will maintain these areas as open meadow for the foreseeable future.

Meanwhile, you may choose to plant, or have our caretaker plant, a tree in a memorial grove.

See our commemorative planting guide for more information. What areas are open for tree planting?

We're trying a new concept: sequential burial. "Sequential burial" means that you purchase the right to be buried at Greensprings, but the actual site isn't assigned until time of death. (Military cemeteries use this concept.) Burials take place one after the next in a block, working away from previously buried sites and reducing the chance of damage. The New York State Cemetery Board has reviewed and approved our plans.

What kinds of markers are permitted on a grave?

You may have an inscription engraved on a flat natural fieldstone or quarried stone, no more than 400 inches square and 3 inches thick and indigenous to the Finger Lakes. The stone must be flush to the ground. Stones may not be machined or polished. See coffins, shrouds, and stones for more information.

You are responsible for finding, transporting, and placing the stone, and for having it engraved. Or you may pay our caretaker to do it for you.

Inscriptions weather away over time; even a tree isn't forever. How will my descendants find my grave?

We mark the corners of each lot special cemetery lot survey markers and the head and foot each grave with ceramic magnets or special magnetized nails that can be readily found with a hand-held metal detector. We also mark them on a survey map; copies are available.

Who knows; maybe your descendants will decide to have your stone re-engraved.

Tell me what the graves at Greensprings will look like.

We replace all the soil that is removed from a grave. This gives a mounded effect. Over time the soil will settle and will eventually lay flat again, just as it did before the grave was dug. Because the soil settles unevenly, we mulch over graves at first, not revegetating them until several months or even a year has passed. (Fall is the best time for replanting a grave.) Eventually the graves in restoration areas will return to woodland.

No artificial flowers or other decorations may be placed on graves. Natural wreaths and flowers—please, no vases—are fine.

How do I plan ahead for burial?

The short answer: buy a site. Find out more about planning ahead here.

What if I move somewhere else? May I sell my site?

If you decide you want to sell your lot, we will buy it back at the price you paid plus 4% simple interest as required by law—but our payment to you will not exceed the current price of a lot.

May I bury my pets here?

New York cemetery law says "no."

You don't allow embalming. But isn't it the law?

No state in the U.S. requires embalming, though some may require it if burial doesn't take place within a set amount of time—usually 24 or 48 hours. New York has no such law.

Where bodies are transported by common carrier—by plane or other means—these three states require embalming: Kansas, Idaho, and Minnesota. Two states, New Jersey and Alaska, require embalming for transporting out of state by any means if the body won't arrive at its final destination within 24 hours of death. And Alabama requires embalming for any out-of-state transport by any means. Yet dry ice is a routinely accepted alternative to embalming. We accept embalmed bodies for burial where required by such laws and where you are unable to get buy-in for using dry ice—but you must request permission from our superintendent or one of our trustees. See our rules

and regulations .

If your loved one dies at home and you will hold a wake there, you'll want to buy plenty of dry ice or ice packs to place beneath and around the body.

How dangerous is embalming?

Actually, the main danger is to embalmers, who are at risk for certain types of cancer and other diseases. Likewise, there's a certain risk inherent simply in manufacturing and transporting a toxic chemical. But by the time a body is in the ground, the formaldehyde in the embalming fluid has broken down into carbon, oxygen, and water—or so we understand it!

True, there are still wells and streams near old cemeteries being polluted by the arsenic that, many years ago, was used to embalm the dead. But we know of no research that shows current danger.

Isn't embalming a help in preventing the spread of disease?

Actually, most disease organisms die with the body, or soon after death. Decay bacteria take over next—regardless if the body is embalmed or not. Embalming only slows it down for the short haul.

Tell me more about the sorts of coffins we may use.

We prefer that coffins be simply constructed of local, sustainably harvested lumber, and you may make your own. We don't allow coffins made from imported rainforest lumber. Alternatively, people may be legally interred in a shroud or in a cardboard container. A funeral director can provide these. You may sew or weave a shroud, and a favorite quilt or blanket is fine, too—but ask your funeral director about it ahead of time. See coffins, shrouds, and stones for more information.

Bear in mind that we don't permit concrete or steel vaults, or bronze or steel caskets or casket liners. Biodegradable is the watchword here.

What's the ecological cost of contemporary burial?

Each year in the U.S.'s 22,500 cemeteries we bury roughly:

827,060 gallons of embalming fluid

90,272 tons of steel (caskets)

2,700 tons of copper and bronze (caskets)

1,636,000 tons of reinforced concrete (vaults)

14,000 tons of steel (vaults)

30-plus million board feet of hardwoods (much tropical; caskets)

Emissions and pesticide use:

Though we haven't found good figures for emissions (from lawn mowing, trimming, etc.) or synthetic pesticide and fertilizer use, it's got to be mega-tons each year. (Depending on the type of mower used, cutting grass for one hour emits as much pollution as driving a car from 100 to 650 miles.)

The average cemetery buries 1,000 gallons of embalming fluid, 97.5 tons of steel, 2,028 tons of concrete, and 56,250 board feet of high quality wood in just one acre of green.

The ecological cost of cremation:

Each cremation releases between .8 and 5.9 grams of mercury as bodies are burned. This amounts to somewhere between 1,000 and 7,800 pounds of mercury each year. Seventy-five percent goes into the air and the rest settles into the ground and water.

Cremation removes the body from the cycle of nature, keeping it from nourishing new life. We prefer earth burial.

You could drive about 4,800 miles on the energy equivalent of the energy used to cremate someone—and to the moon and back 83 times on the energy from all cremations in one year in the U.S.

Cremations of Tompkins County residents during the past year released between 1.2 and 6.8 pounds of mercury into the atmosphere. This estimate is based on a 20% statewide cremation rate—though the county's rate is probably higher.

Your body is a natural resource, rich with life-sustaining nutrients. Your choice for natural burial is a choice for natural renewal and growth—a way to give back to the earth that sustains us all.