

Natural Burial Guidelines

A Natural Burial option will be available from 1 December 2015. An area has been set aside in Gungahlin Cemetery specifically for natural or green burials. In addition, a burial that meets the basic requirements for a natural burial may be carried out in any Canberra Cemeteries burial allotment.

By choosing a natural burial, people are choosing a burial method that has a lower environmental impact. A natural burial reduces the energy and resource consumption associated with traditional burial practices in the longer term.

Definition

‘A natural burial is the act of returning a body as naturally as possible to the earth. To achieve this, we recommend that the body not be embalmed or cremated, but instead buried in a simple casket or shroud, in a protected green space.’ [[The Natural Burial Association](#)]

General

Only biodegradable and non-toxic materials may be buried with the body as part of a natural burial. Natural burials will have no permanent visual markers – the intent is for graves to blend into the surrounding bushland.

The location of all graves will be recorded on a GPS mapping system and in-situ with a Radio Frequency Identification Device (RFID). The location of cremated remains in the Natural Burial Ground is not mapped.

For those wishing to visit the actual site of a loved one’s burial, a map will be available from the Canberra Cemeteries office.

In the areas set aside for natural burial an assessment of each individual natural burial location will be undertaken to ensure minimal impact on trees and other vegetation, and to avoid areas of erosion or overland water flow.

All burials will conform to statutory requirements under the *Cemeteries and Crematoria Act 2003*.

Terms and Conditions for Natural Burials

1. Exclusive Right of Allotment may be issued for the following categories:

- a) single depth burial (max 1200mm deep)
- b) companion burials (side by side) When the first burial takes place, the site next to it will be allocated until needed.

2. Sites will be single burial only

With exception of cremated remains, a second burial is not currently permitted in a grave. In future, a second burial may be possible (e.g. 30 years after a burial) but this would be at the sole discretion of cemetery management.

3. Interment or scattering of cremated remains

The interment or scattering of cremated remains is allowed in most locations in the Natural Burial Ground at the sole discretion of cemetery management. Interment of cremated remains shall be contained in a bio-degradable container or placed directly into the earth and cannot be retrieved. The exact location of cremated remains will not be recorded. Standard fees for the interment of cremated remains and plaque fees (if required) will apply.

4. Sites may be pre-purchased

In general, the location of the grave cannot be reserved and will be determined by Cemetery staff immediately prior to burial. The exception is for a “companion grave” which may be reserved at the time of the first burial. This grave may be on either side of the burial.

Grave locations will be selected on a “next available space” basis in accordance with the layout and arrangement of each natural burial area and at the sole discretion of Canberra Cemeteries Management.

5. For burial, the body:

- a) cannot be embalmed.
- b) must be wrapped in a container¹ made of natural fibres or material. If a coffin or casket is used it must be sealed and with the exception of screws or nails, constructed of natural untreated material. All materials including clothing must all be from sustainable sources and be biodegradable.

6. To minimise environment impacts

- a) any other material placed with the body must be biodegradable
- b) soil removed in preparation for the burial will be placed adjacent to the grave and used for backfill.

7. No planting may take place

Other than by Canberra Cemeteries. The Exclusive Right Holder may choose a plant from the approved list of trees, small shrubs or forbs which will be planted

¹ A container for the purposes of these Guidelines may include but not necessarily be limited to: a natural, untreated timber coffin, a wicker coffin, a cardboard coffin (without plastic coating) or a shroud, providing that it meets the requirements of the ACT Chief Health Officer.

within a reasonable amount of time and subject to availability by Canberra Cemeteries staff.

8. Tokens of remembrance

Flowers may be placed on the grave at the time of burial but will be removed after two weeks.

At other times, tokens of any kind, including flowers, will not be permitted on the grave. Fresh flowers and other tokens may be placed at the communal memorial. In keeping with the ethos of the space, all ribbons, ties and wrappings on flowers must be biodegradable. Canberra Cemeteries reserves the right to remove any material it considers not in keeping with the ethos of the space or that has deteriorated beyond an acceptable state.

9. No headstone, edging or other stone, vase, embellishment

No headstone edging or other stone, vase, embellishment or any other structure shall be placed on or around the grave.

10. A communal memorial will be available

A communal memorial will be available at the entrance to the Natural Burial Ground for remembrance of the deceased.

11. Plaques

Plaques of an appropriate size, determined by Canberra Cemeteries, will be included in the standard package to be placed on the communal memorial. Typical information contained on a plaque will include: Name; date of birth and death, location of burial and very small epitaph.

12. Details of each grave will be accurately recorded

Details of each grave will be accurately recorded within Canberra Cemeteries' management system, on a digital map and in-situ with an RFID.

13. Maintenance

Canberra Cemeteries reserves the right to:

- a) remove and dispose of any object or plantings from the area;
- b) maintain the bushland where necessary to meet safety and aesthetic standards.

14. Grave digging

Canberra Cemeteries will carry out all digging of graves and any associated work. Conditions (such as weather and the position and surroundings of the grave) permitting and at the sole discretion of Authority staff mourners may assist, under supervision, with backfilling of the grave by hand.

15. All burials are intended to be the last resting place

Private exhumation is at the sole discretion of the Canberra Cemeteries Management and will only be granted on a case by case basis in exceptional circumstances as determined by management.