



Frequently Asked Questions

Cost Considerations & Logistics

How much does it cost?

The Vermont Forest Cemetery Board of Directors has set the policy that **burial rights will never be sold without the associated service charge paid at the lowest possible rate.** The cost of burial rights is \$1000 per lot, and Participatory burial services are \$1400. The burial service charge varies with the amount of family participation.

The Participatory burial charge is assessed when there are at least four people who are willing to be a part of the burial process: carrying the body to the gravesite, lowering the body, and at least beginning to fill in the grave. The bereaved may, if they wish, participate in opening the grave as well.

Attended burial costs \$2500. If the bereaved wish to be present at the burial but without participating beyond bearing witness, VFC staff will carry the body, lower it into the ground, and close the grave, as well as assisting with parking and guiding the bereaved to the site.

Unattended burial costs \$2000. VFC staff can complete the burial process without the bereaved present.

In addition to the cost of the deed and the burial service charge, the Town of Roxbury charges \$20 for filing fees. There are additional charges for burials on weekends, winter, staff support, but these can only be assessed as needed at the time of burial. Our current price list is always available on our website. The minimum cost—for a weekday burial in the non-winter months—is \$2420. The maximum cost—for a winter burial on

a weekend with everything done by VFC staff—would be \$4220. These prices are valid as of July 2025.

How many people will I need to carry out the physical tasks of my burial at VFC? What skills or physical capabilities do they need to have?

For the average sized adult, four to six reasonably strong people will be adequate to carry the body and lower it. The Participatory rate applies if there are four or more people to help close the grave. Note: there is no obligation or expectation that participants will complete the entire fill; staff can assist.

What if I don't have anyone to help?

Vermont Forest Cemetery can, with advance notice, provide staff to carry, lower, and fill. **It is important that we be notified as soon as possible so that we can schedule people to assist.** See our price list for service charges for Attended and Unattended burials performed by staff.

How long can you wait between death and burial?

When a body is properly prepared or cooled, you can wait between 3-10 days. Cooling ideally begins within 5-7 hours of death for any body being kept for more than 24 hours. Each body is different, and every death is unique. If sheltering the body for longer than 3 days, we recommend working with a funeral home with a mortuary cooler.

Is there anything unexpected that I should be aware of?

This is a participatory event in a rustic, rural setting, and some GPS apps give incorrect directions. Please make sure to check the website for turn-by-turn directions ahead of time and pass along the driving instructions to family and friends invited to the burial. It's a very profound experience for most people, and families and loved ones have consistently said the process has helped them to better begin the work of grieving their loss. Each burial will look different according to the wishes of the family, which is the beauty of what we do at Vermont Forest Cemetery.

What about home burials?

This non-profit cemetery is prohibited by law from providing burial services anywhere but at our cemetery. However, Green Mountain Funeral Alternatives (GMFA) is a for-profit business founded by Michelle Hogle Acciavatti that can help you plan to be buried on your own property. Land must not be mortgaged and meet local zoning as well as state statutory siting guidelines. Michelle can discuss other common-sense considerations and how to make sure you have the right support for the burial.

How do I make a plan?

To make a plan to care for your loved one after death and/or natural burial at Vermont Forest Cemetery, your own property, or at another burial ground with a natural burial section, email Michelle at michelle@memorial.eco to schedule an appointment. One-on-one tours of the Cemetery with Michelle are included in the planning process.

How do I visit the Cemetery?

The Cemetery is open for visits 365 days a year from dawn to dusk. We simply ask that you stay on the trails, be respectful of gravesites, and dress appropriately for being in the woods. Dogs are welcome but we strongly suggest they be kept on leash. We encourage children and many trails are compatible with an all-terrain stroller. Maps are available in a box mounted on our cottage office. Much of the Cemetery is accessible by car and we are actively working on making sure we can accommodate mobility limitations on our trails. A few of our main trails are navigable with all-terrain aids such as roller walkers. We have one we can provide if needed. As of July 2025, these include Shepherd's Trail, Eileen's Ring, and the beginning of Kate's Way.

Can staff show me around the Cemetery?

We offer group tours 2-3 times per month in the non-winter months. The schedule can be found on our website at <https://www.cemetery.eco/event-list> and tours are also announced in our newsletter. These involve 60- to 90-minute hikes through the Cemetery grounds with VFC staff guides. If you have mobility concerns, please contact us ahead of time so we can make accommodations.

If you have mobility limitations or are absolutely unable to attend one of our many group events during the year we can arrange private tours for groups of four or more by appointment. **Please email info@cemetery.eco to do so.** Our founder and head cemerterian Michelle Acciavatti, as well as our cemeterian Bailey McLaughlin, are available to lead tours but we do not have the staff at this time to provide private tours for fewer than four people unless the purpose of the visit is to select a grave site for a recent or imminent death (see below). Since natural burial takes community, though, it is good practice to find community who can visit with you.

How accessible is the Cemetery?

Accessibility to this remote, rustic Cemetery is a work in progress for us. Northside Cemetery Lane is accessible to all passenger cars—as well as motorized wheelchairs or scooters—and offers a good visual experience of the Cemetery. However, most gravesites are not visible or directly accessible from the Lane.

A few of our main trails are navigable with all-terrain aids such as roller walkers. As of July 2025, these include Shepherd's Trail, Eileen's Ring, and the beginning of Kate's Way. There are burial areas accessible from these three trails and we encourage people to take the mobility needs of their potential mourners into consideration when selecting a site.

Gravesite Selection

How big is the Cemetery? How many burial sites will there be in total?

The entire property is 56.7 acres, divided in two sections—Northside and Southridge—by the northernmost headwaters of the Third Branch of the White River. We estimate that the amount of land suitable for natural burial will be between 20 and 30 acres. The general rule of thumb for natural burial in meadow areas is 100± sites per acre. Some specific locations will not be suitable due to slope, roots, rocks, and trees. So a very conservative estimate is that there will be anywhere between 1,000 to 2,000 sites available at Vermont Forest Cemetery.

Can I pick my spot?

Burial sites can be selected when death is imminent or expected within the next 6 months and/or the person is enrolled in hospice. Graveholders do not select their site in advance for multiple reasons. Any spot will change with time as the forest grows ; a site you fell in love with ten years ago may have a large tree now in its place! As we continue to grow as a cemetery, more areas will be opened and over time Graveholders might find an area they love even better. It can be more helpful to think of a location as the backdrop to your burial rather than a “forever home.”

There is one important exception. Once one person is buried from a group that has bought lots together, the others will be able to claim adjacent (or nearby) spots. For example, if a wife dies before her husband, and both have burial rights at VFC, the closest burial spot that is practical will be set aside for the husband.

What about markers?

Markers must meet our policies for size and material and all insignia and inscriptions are reviewed by Cemetery staff before placement. In “rewilding” sections, which are less humanscaped, markers must be small and marked with only name and date. No marker should be in a concrete base. A stone or wooden base can be used in place of concrete. Those who have earned the right to grave markers from the Veterans Administration are welcome to place flat granite or marble stones in a natural base; headstones or bronze markers may not be used. If the bereaved do not wish to place a marker, they

may choose to decorate with branches and stones gathered from the surrounding area, or to let their burial site rewild.

Can I plant something?

The short answer is *possibly*. If a family wishes to plant at the burial site, the plants must be native or naturalized to an acceptable degree; while a list is being developed, plantings are approved on a case by case basis. New plants must be transplanted bare root. If you are unsure about which plant you'd like to use, please contact us and we will offer advice and suggestions. In the future, Vermont Forest Cemetery will have landscaping and planting projects that will be carried out with the help of both volunteers and Graveholders.

Burials

Who can be buried?

Anyone is welcome to be buried at Vermont Forest Cemetery. Bodies must arrive at the Cemetery in good condition. Our sister business Green Mountain Funeral Alternatives can help you learn how to prepare a body for natural burial if you do not wish to hire a funeral director to do so. VFC does not inter cremated remains unless there are extraordinary and unavoidable circumstances at the time of death or the person has donated their body for medical research. However, ashes after cremation may be buried with a human body, so, for instance, a previously cremated spouse may be interred with a Graveholder.

Can I bury my pet in the forest?

We are not currently burying companion animals at Vermont Forest Cemetery. Policies do allow for the ashes of pets to be buried with a human.

What types of containers can be used?

Bodies should be laid in a casket or shroud made of natural, biodegradable materials. Caskets must be made of softwood (spruce, pine, fir, etc.) and be unvarnished; screws or nails and small metal fittings are okay. As much as possible, shrouds should be made of an all natural material. If a family would like to use a sentimental fabric (ex. a family quilt) they may be buried in that fabric even if the fabric content is not known. If the body is shrouded, it must be in a tray or have a backboard. If you are unsure of where to obtain a backboard, contact us as soon as possible.

We must know the dimensions of the casket or shrouded body and backboard in advance. Each grave is dug to size and it is essential we know the size of the casket or

backboard so that we can dig graves no bigger than necessary. We would also appreciate knowing the approximate weight. This information is important so we can make sure there will be enough people to carry and lower the body safely.

What about winter?

We do burials all through the winter, and have tools to break the frost line if needed. We do take into consideration inclement weather when planning a burial. Safety is the priority, and we will delay burials for extreme weather conditions. The roads around the Cemetery are some of the best-maintained in the area because quite a few people live on this ridge

What about mud season?

Mud season is the most difficult time for road transportation. The Cemetery roads and trails are generally passable and burials do take place, but Vermont Forest Cemetery is closed to all non-burial related visitors in order to lessen the impact on town roads during mud season. In very extreme circumstances, we will work with the families to find a place to shelter the bodies in a mortuary cooler until roads are safe.

What should I wear to a burial?

If you are planning on participating in the lowering and filling of the grave we have a few recommendations of what to wear. Sturdy close-toed shoes are essential regardless of season. We recommend clothing that you don't mind getting soil on, as well as layers so that you can be comfortable as you work. Be sure to keep an eye on the weather and dress for a range of temperatures and conditions. We do have umbrellas in case of rain, though it is often the case during summer months that the canopy is thick enough to block most of the rainfall. Don't forget to accessorize with a water bottle as well as sunscreen and bug repellent.

Can I do a natural burial if...

What happens after organ/tissue donation/autopsy?

All of the above are consistent with natural burial, though some extra preparation of the body may be necessary. Conventional burial preparation after these procedures uses plastic, while in natural burial we use cotton, cornstarch and/or compostable butcher paper and containers. GMFA can assist families and funeral directors who wish to prepare a body for natural burial and can provide appropriate containers. Please reach out with any questions.

What about after medical research donation?

Bodies that are donated to medical research are cremated before being returned to the family. Sometimes the heavily-embalmed body parts are returned, but never an intact body. That said, we would never want someone to have to choose between natural burial and donating their body. We will absolutely bury their cremated (or embalmed non-intact) remains, and amend the gravesite accordingly.

What about artificial joints?

If it was safe in the body, it's safe in the soil. We do ask that any removable medical devices with batteries, such as pacemakers be removed prior to burial when possible. Other external medical devices such as colonoscopy pouches are at the discretion and comfort of the individual.

What about cremation or water cremation?

We do not offer burial services for remains after any form of cremation unless there are extraordinary and unavoidable circumstances at the time of death or the person has donated their body to medical research. Cremated remains of pets or human beings can be buried with a human body.

What about Natural Organic Reduction (human composting)?

Burial of composted remains is possible, just as for a whole body.

What about water and soil contamination from drugs in the body?

In natural burial, the soil breaks down organic compounds along with the body. This includes antidepressants, chemotherapy drugs, hormones, and formaldehyde. All gravesites meet State of Vermont guidelines for safe burial depth and distances from drinking water sources to ensure there is adequate soil cover to accomplish this.

Will animals dig up the body?

Many years of experience at natural burial cemeteries (as well as the long history of human burial prior to the mid-19th century) have shown that this is not an issue. Bodies are buried at a depth of 3.5 feet which means more than 2+ feet of soil is on top of the body. This acts as both a physical barrier and a chemical barrier. The soil breaks down the chemical compounds that create smells that would typically alert a scavenger. And in any case, there is an abundant amount for scavengers to eat on the surface that doesn't require digging over 2 feet, and through a casket or shroud. The only animal disturbances we've seen are those drawn to freshly turned soil but such activities are limited to the upper few inches of a grave site.

Natural Burials beyond Vermont

I don't live in Vermont - what are my options?

If you are not local to Vermont or the New England area, you are welcome if burial at Vermont Forest Cemetery would be meaningful to you. However, we urge you to consider that the transportation of your remains will be challenging to the family and will be costly (especially if you will need to use a funeral director), and the carbon cost will be considerable as well. We encourage all those living more than 5 hours away to investigate the many existing and planned natural burial grounds closer to their locations. Greenburialnaturally.org maintains a guide listing cemeteries around the US and Canada.

Misc.

Can I sell my burial rights?

Burial deeds may not be sold, but are transferable under specific circumstances. Transfer can be willed or made to immediate family members. Exceptions will be considered under extraordinary circumstances. If a deed is to be transferred, Vermont Forest Cemetery must be notified at the time of transfer, and must receive current contact details of the person receiving the burial rights.

What if I change my mind ?

We understand that circumstances may change at time of death and burial at VFC may not be the right choice. However, burial rights at Vermont Forest Cemetery are non-refundable. If you have bought a lot and choose not to use it, we will treat the purchase as a donation.

I can't afford the full amount. Do you offer payment plans?

Full payment is due at the time of purchase; we are unable to offer payment plans. We understand that burial at VFC may not be affordable for everyone. Our hope is that people will have planned in advance for burial. If paying in installments would help, we recommend simply setting a small amount aside each month until you have saved the whole amount.

What is your policy on grave re-use?

Grave re-use, or grave renewal, is a common practice in many countries. After the original body has mostly or completely decomposed, any remains are either removed or pressed into the soil and the space is once again made available for burial. We are exploring the possibility of offering this at some point in the future, but only when we better understand the rate of decomposition in our specific environment, and only for those who have explicitly opted in to do so.

How can I volunteer?

By volunteering, you can play a vital role in promoting sustainable practices, honoring nature and giving back to the community. Some reasons to volunteer with VFC:

- **Make a Difference:** Help us provide a serene, natural resting place for our community members and their loved ones.
- **Connect with Nature:** Enjoy our beautiful grounds while contributing to environmental conservation.
- **Be Part of a Community:** Meet like-minded individuals who share your passion!

Every contribution counts! Whether you can offer a few hours a week, a month, or a year to or assist with specific events, your support is invaluable. Together, we can make a lasting impact! We are always looking for artists, woodworkers, trail guides & stewards, ushers, pallbearers and more!

Send us an email to bailey@cemetery.eco to be added or go to <https://bit.ly/VFC-vol> to sign up!

How can I donate?

No contribution is too small and every gift helps us grow. The Vermont Forest Cemetery is a recognized 501.c.13 nonprofit organization, and most donations are tax deductible.

Online donations can be made by following the link below:

<https://www.cemetery.eco/support>

We also accept check donation via mail at:

Vermont Forest Cemetery

P.O. Box 76
Roxbury, VT 05669

What if I still have questions?

If you have general questions, there are a few options:

- 1) Email info@cemetery.eco - questions usually receive a response within a couple of business days.
- 2) Come on a tour. We offer regular tours in the non-winter months. These are a wonderful opportunity to see the Cemetery for yourself and ask questions. We announce these tours on website cemetery.eco/event-list as well as in our newsletter.
- 3) Attend a screening of *From Earth to Earth*. We are incredibly fortunate to have a short documentary that shows a burial at VFC as well as an interview with our founder and the story of how the Cemetery came to be. We offer screenings in communities throughout Vermont throughout the year, and each screening is followed by a Q&A session. Please check out the website and newsletter to find one near you or contact us to arrange it at info@cemetery.eco.
- 4) During the winter months, we offer a regularly scheduled Zoom Q&A calls. These are listed on our website cemetery.eco/event-list as well as in our newsletter

Who should I get in touch with for ____?

To arrange a burial, tours for a group of four or more, to volunteer, or to purchase burial rights:

Bailey McLaughlin
Cemeterian
bailey@cemetery.eco
802-234-1454

For general questions, to arrange a screening of *From Earth to Earth*, or if those with mobility limitations wish to visit the Cemetery:

Jim Hogle
Board Member, Community Outreach & Event Coordination and General Questions
info@cemetery.eco

For talks, interviews and other public appearances, special interest tours, and GMFA inquiries:

Michelle Hogle Acciavatti

Founder & Head Cemeterian, Funeral Director for Green Mountain Funeral
Alternatives

michelle@memorial.eco

802-234-1747

For logistical inquiries related to a planned or imminent burial:

Paul Acciavatti

Sexton & Cemeterian

sexton@cemetery.eco

(802) 234-1262