



10 things to consider when planning a green funeral

We are all encouraged to have a light carbon footprint, buy fair trade and be more environmentally friendly. It is only natural then that having gone to such trouble in life, that we are starting to think about these things in death also. In many respects funerals represent a final frontier in the move towards embracing all things environmentally friendly.

1. Deciding whether to opt for burial or cremation is a good place to start.

Although cremation was promoted after the war as being environmentally preferable to burial, modern thinking is challenging this. As well as the use of gas, a natural resource, carbon dioxide is produced and harmful pollutants are released into the atmosphere. Natural decomposition after burial is certainly less harmful to the environment - especially in natural burial grounds. Many people find great comfort from knowing their loved ones are in a peaceful, natural setting where wildlife abounds and where the cycle of life is encouraged to take its course.

2. Do you need a coffin?

There is no legal requirement to use a coffin for burial, although most crematoria will insist on one. If you choose, you can simply wrap the body in a sheet or blanket, or there are purpose made shrouds available. Two examples are a natural felt shroud, or one woven from wool from Norfolk sheep.

3. If you do opt for a coffin as the focal point of the ceremony, the choice is of the utmost importance.

Research from the Natural Death Centre indicates that up to 89% of coffins used each year - around 600,000 - are made from chipboard covered with laminate. Although biodegradable, when used for cremations they can give off harmful pollutants into the atmosphere. Environmentally friendly alternatives include coffins made from materials including wicker, bamboo, willow, cardboard and even woven leaves.

Cardboard coffins or those made from compacted recycled paper are available in a host of different colours and designs and can be personalised by families - a process which can help with the grieving process. Strong, biodegradable and suitable for burials and cremations, they're becoming increasingly popular.

4. Consider alternative resting places for cremated remains.

If you're looking to somewhere to bury or inter the ashes of a loved one then woodland burials offer a range of options - from meadows where saplings are planted to mark graves through to burials in mature woodland such as Colney Woodland Burial Park in Norwich. After consultation with the "Green Team" at Wymondham High School, we have developed a wide choice of environmentally friendly urns available made from wicker, papier-mache, and salt and sand dissolvable sea urns. You can consider scattering ashes in local beauty spots, burying them at sea, or even placing them under an environmentally friendly memorial in your garden at home.

5. Be creative with floral tributes

Many families opt for charitable donations in lieu of flowers, limiting floral tributes to close family members only. Avoid flowers wrapped in cellophane, arranged in oasis or tied with plastic ribbon, and opt for natural materials instead, such as a raffia tie or woven baskets. You can make your own flower tributes, or we can advise you on florists who will be happy to arrange tributes from seasonal flowers and foliage that you supply from your own gardens.

6. Consider memorial options carefully

Many memorial stones are made from stone that's imported from as far away as India and China. Perfitts in Diss is a local stonemason that we work closely with and they can advise on stone that has been sourced locally. For burials taking place at natural burial sites or on private land, you may wish to consider wooden memorials and we can put you in touch with woodcarvers who will work with you to commission a unique memorial to mark the final resting place.

7. Minimise the amount of fuel needed

Try to choose a location for the ceremony as close to home as possible to cut down on fuel emissions. For a really local funeral, we can process the coffin by foot on a wheeled bier. Also bear in mind the miles involved in visiting the burial site afterwards.

8. Ask for the grave to be prepared by hand

All the graves we prepare are dug by Rosedale staff. If you want a funeral that is as green as possible, Simon and Wil are happy to oblige by preparing the grave by hand, without the aid of a mechanical digger.

9. Make a carbon offset from your estate

Over the course of a life time, most of us have developed a pretty large carbon footprint. It would be a great legacy to make a contribution to a tree planting scheme, such as the Woodland Trust, offsetting all your carbon emissions.

10. Plan your funeral in advance.

While planning your funeral may not be at the top of your list of priorities, it can save an awful lot of distress if you share your thoughts with someone close to you. Funerals are often organised quickly by people who can feel under pressure and it's easy for those left behind to make conventional choices that you may not have made. By making your plans known now, when the time comes loved ones will find comfort in doing what they know you wanted. In the meantime, you can enjoy living a greener life, safe in the knowledge that your environmentally aware ethics won't be abandoned in the end.