Yes!
Natural Burial
is Legal!

A Natural Burial Planner

FOR

_____

(Your name here)

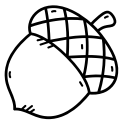
Herein lie my preferences for a sustainable funeral



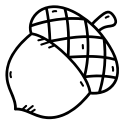
Includes Michigan- Specific Info & Resources

What is a natural burial?

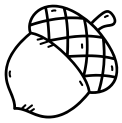
Natural burial (often also called “green burial”) is a practice available in Michigan and involves sustainable direct burial, allowing the body to decompose and return to the earth. In general, a natural burial:



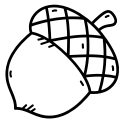
Uses biodegradable containers or wraps



Declines the use of chemical embalming



Does not use a concrete vault or grave liner



Uses a natural grave marker

Wait! What’s wrong with Conventional Burial & Cremation?

The most popular disposition options are currently **conventional <u>burial</u>** and **<u>cremation</u>**. Both have an important place in deathcare but can have negative environmental impacts when used as the default choices for Michigan funerals .

Impacts of Conventional Burial

A 10 acre cemetery contains:



Enough toxic formalin to fill a backyard swimming pool



Enough coffin wood to make more than >40 houses (often exotic/imported trees)



Nearly 1,000 tons of casket steel and 20 tons of vault concrete



Gallons of pesticide & fertilizer for cemetery upkeep

Impacts of Fire Cremation



Releases carbon dioxide, carbon monoxide, and other greenhouse gasses (a tree would need ~10 years of growth to offset CO2 produced)



Practice is fossil fuel reliant, with about 26 gallons of fuel needed for fire cremation

Sources: 1. Harris, Mark. Grave Matters: A Journey Through the Modern Funeral Industry to a Natural Way of Burial; 2. The Green Burial Council.

Why is Pre-planning Important for Natural Burial?

Time Constraints. Natural burials generally need to happen more quickly than conventional burial.

Limited Cemeteries. There are fewer cemeteries that support natural burial (~20 in Michigan). It can be tough to find them!

Limited Options. Natural burial is not supported by all funeral directors. Finding someone ahead of time that supports your wishes and/or a death doula who can help advocate for you is important.

Definitions Vary. While conventional burial practices are common and well understood, fewer are familiar with natural burial and may have varying definitions of what it means. It is essential to spell out the details and practices that matter most to you

Winter Burial is Tricky. Most cemeteries offering green burial also allow winter burial. Cemeteries have different methods for this that may involve prolonged storage or special equipment. Given that it is hard to predict your time of death, it is best to make winter burial decisions and cemetery choices well ahead of time.

It's not the Norm.Despite being the traditional form of burial for most people of the world, green/natural burial remains uncommon throughout Michigan and the United States. This includes with funeral directors, who are still gaining experience with these practices. With green burial there will be different sets of choices available to survivors and less flexibility in scheduling than what most Americans have become accustomed to. It is essential that your family, friends, and funeral director clearly understand your wishes as they quickly finalize the details of how they will care for your body, assemble the appropriate burial materials, and plan a memorial service.

About this Planner

This is not your regular funeral planner. Rather than reading like a legal document with difficult jargon, the hope is to have this read more like a magazine. Each page includes space to document your preferences alongside user-friendly regional information and resources.

This is not a legally binding document, but it can help clearly express your desires to your loved ones. Planning ahead means that you can design a final farewell that is reflective of ***YOU***. Communicating your wishes gives you agency while also assisting your family, friends, and loved ones when the time inevitably comes for them to arrange your funeral or celebration of life.

We're also working on a full-page editable PDF version of this planner. All versions will be posted for free at the following link, as they become available:

www.hickorynutfarmstead.com/planning

Basic Plan Information

Plan Holder Information

(person for whom this burial/funeral plan has been created)

(Name, printed)

(Signiture) (Date)

Address:

Phone/Other Contact Info:

Identify Your Adovcates

Family, Designated Funeral Representatives or Surviving Friends who I have discussed this plan with:

Full Name & Contact Info :

Full Name & Contact Info :

Full Name & Contact Info :

Full Name & Contact Info :

Additional people I have discussed this plan with or who have a copy (include any funeral homes, death/end-of-life doulas, etc)

Document Your Surviving Kin & Representatives

The time constraints and and practices associated with green/ natural burial make it extra important to identify any **possible major participants** in your burial/funeral activities. *That includes who should make any remaining decisions, who would most need or want to be aware of your burial, and who might need to make quick decisions about their travel plans in order to attend.*



After death, your body becomes the "property" of your next of kin under Michigan Law. Such persons have the right to direct the final disposition of it. This follows a specific order of succession: legal spouse, adult children, adult grandchildren, parents, grandparents, siblings, etc. At the same time, activities must take place under the supervision of a licensed funeral director, who is responsible for completing legal paperwork/maintaining certain standards of care.

Note that a Life Partner has no legal standing for directing your burial arrangements (**unless legally designated as your Funeral Representative--see below!**)

What is a Funeral Representative?

Michigan law also allows for you to designate a legally binding **"Funeral Representative"** and **successor representatives** that take priority over/ supersede the next of kin succession. Such designations may include family members, life partners, and friends. These designations do, however, have to be appropriately documented to be legal.

If you wish to designate one or more funeral representatives, be sure to print and complete documentation and have it notarized to make this legal. The MFDA Funeral Representative Designation form works well:

Close Surviving Family & Friends

Spouse or Life Partner:

(Name and best contact info)

Children

(Name and best contact info)

(Name and best contact info)

Check here if a list of additional names is appended

Other Essential Next of Kin

(Name, relationship, and best contact info)

(Name, relationship, and best contact info)

Check here if a list of additional names is appended

Other Close Survivors (Important Family & Friends)

(Name, relationship, and best contact info)

(Name, relationship, and best contact info)

Check here if a list of additional names is appended

Designated Funeral Representative

Legally Designated Funeral Representatives
(with copy of valid notarized forms attached)

(Name of Representative and best contact info)

(Name of Successor Representative and best contact info)

Choose a Funeral Home

Natural burial is not understood or supported by all funeral homes. Finding someone ahead of time that supports your wishes can help ensure you have a funeral that reflects YOUR values.

It may be a good idea to meet with a few funeral homes while pre-planning to find someone familiar with natural burial and comfortable with your end-of-life preferences. Two places with a list of possibilities local to you include the Green Burial Council (GBC) and the Global Green Burial Alliance.

The listings of both organizations compliment each other, and the Global Green Burial Alliance often includes smaller local venues not listed on the GBC. Both are worth consulting for funeral directory listings.

Note that your local death doulas (see page 9) often best understand the local deathcare landscape. They can be invaluable to quickly learning which funeral directors near you are familiar with natural burial and community-rooted deathcare.

Know The Federal Funeral Rule and Michigan's 48 hour Rule!

Before meeting with funeral homes, familiarize yourself with The Funeral Rule, which mandates transparency when families work with funeral homes and protects against undesired embalming practices. Meanwhile, Michigan's 48 hour rule is pertinent to those planning on green burial. Learn about both on page 9 and 21 of this booklet and at the link below:

www.hickorynutfarmstead.com/planning

As you explore funeral homes, write any preferences here. Consider leaving a copy of your funeral preferences with your final selection.

Funeral Home:

Funeral Director:

Address:

☐ Check this box if this funeral home has a copy of my preferences.

☐ Check this box if you've made any prepayments or policy purchases (this is not required) and attach documentation

Record How Much Discretion You'd Like Your Advocates to Exercise with Your Plan

Please check either #1 or #2 here. Your answers provide guidance for how your funeral representative and/or next of kin should interpret all of your burial/ funeral/ceremonial choices, including your priorities for green burial practices.

Please Select one of the options below

Option #1- Taking into account my explicit wishes for green/natural burial, I believe that burial and funeral arrangements are for the benefit of the living and I permit my representative to also take into consideration the circumstances of my death and the needs of my survivors (listed earlier in this planner). Unless I specifically note that something is not acceptable, my choices in all burial and funeral criteria are to be considered **my own strong preferences and priorities, but not absolute requirements** if good reasons exist for making adjustments.

Option #2: What I indicate below are my explicit, non-negotiable personal wishes for my burial and funeral arrangements. I would like them followed as closely as possible, with minimal modifications made only when legally necessary and determined solely by my funeral representative or applicable next of kin.

Body Care Preferences

What is a Home Funeral?

Home funerals are a community-centered approach where families and friends take charge of caring for a loved one's body after death, typically within the home, for a short period before burial or cremation. It can involve aspects like preparing the body (washing/dressing), holding a vigil, and handling logistics and transportation. Some type of cooling for the body is necessary during this process (eg, dry ice). It is legally permitted in all 50 states. For those interested, **Death Doulas can be invaluable in helping families through this process (see page 11).**

Note that Michigan is one of a small handful of states in the country that does require a funeral director for some parts of the funeral process (certification of the the death certificate and supervision of final disposition). If desired, transportation by the family can often be done by collaborating with a flexible funeral home to secure a "burial transit permit."

Find more information about how to conduct a home funeral here:

HOME FUNERAL ALLIANCE

www.homefuneralalliance.org

Body Preservation

No state in the country requires routine embalming (read more about this on page 22!). However, Michigan may require embalming under certain rare circumstances.

All incredibly rare!

- The person died of diphtheria, meningococcal infections, plague, polio, scarlet fever, or smallpox
- The body will be transported and will not reach its destination within 48 hours after death, unless it is placed in a "sound shipping case."

Some (but not all!) funeral directors incorrectly interpret this to mean bodies absolutely need to be embalmed after 48 hours. Explore protocols with your funeral director and ask about possible alternative preservation methods, sound shipping case options, and/or consider exploring other funeral homes if you prefer a natural burial

In general, the methods listed to the right suffice to preserve bodies until they are ready for natural burial.

Home Funeral Preferences

Do you want your family/friends involved in the care of your body? (eg, washing, dressing, make-up, etc.) or would you prefer a funeral director handle this? Detail your preferences.

FOR THE FOLLOWING SECTIONS: *For any item you consider "Not Acceptable," please enter N/A" in front of it. Prioritize the remaining items, beginning with 1 for most desirable (1, 2, etc.)*

Priority of Acceptable Options for Preservation/ Preparation of your Body

____ I want no bodily preservation at all (except cooling!) - please just bury me

____ You can use any cooling necessary to allow time for my other wishes (within Michigan law, such as refrigeration or dry ice)

____ You can use green embalming of the circulatory system and/ or body cavity

____ You can cremate my body and then bury the cremains in the greenest way still possible, if circumstances require it for a good reason

____ You can use conventional embalming and then bury me in the greenest way still possible, if circumstances require it for a good reason

Explore Death Doulas

What is a Death Doula?

A Death Doula provides support to dying individuals and their loved ones across all stages of the dying and grieving process.

They offer:

- Non-medical holistic support
- Normalize deathcare by creating spaces to talk about death and dying
- Offer resources to help make informed decisions

Death Doulas can advocate for a client's needs. This is especially important for solo agers and folks in marginalized communities.

Note: An end-life-doula is not the same as hospice care. Hospice is a medical service that involves a team of healthcare professionals that focus on symptom management.

How Doulas Can Help:

Death Doulas can take on many roles. Here are just a few ways they can specifically assist with natural burial needs:

- Educate families about eco-friendly options, helping connect them with local resources and identify options that align with their environmental values
- Guide families on the care of their own dead (see page 9 for home funeral info)
- Provide respite for caregivers
- Provide resources and support to grieving families
- Process the emotions and experiences with a loved one
- Incorporate traditions or create new rituals to mark special moments
- Support the spiritual practices of all involved

If you decide to explore local Death Doulas, check out the following resources for listings that may be local to you:

www.mideathcare.org

www.nedalliance.org

Record any Doulas local to you that you may want to work with:

Doula Name or Business:

Location and Contact Info:

Services that interest me:

Doula Name or Business:

Location and Contact Info:

Services that interest me:

Choose a Cemetery

Where can I have a natural burial in Michigan?



www.mideathcare.org/natural-burial

There are 20+cemeteries (and counting!) around the state that support some level of natural burial. Cemeteries have varying policies on lawn care maintenance practices, grave depth, accepted vessels, accepted on-site memorialization options, and many other aspects of burial. It can therefore be helpful to explore and talk to a few different cemeteries. The Michigan Deathcare Collaborative hosts a user-generated map of known cemeteries on their website.

Note, that it is also possible to be buried on private land in Michigan, with pre-planning. Michigan law allows for the creation of private burial grounds of less than 1 acre outside city or village limits. The property must be surveyed and recorded with the county clerk.

Cemetery Preferences

Cemetery Choice (note: know your cemetery rules; green/ natural options vary widely)

☐ **I already own a plot at the following cemetery**
(attach a copy of the certificate)

☐ **I do not own a plot but prefer the following cemetery:**

If any unanticipated challenges arise, I also like the following cemeteries:

Priority of Acceptable Forms of Memorialization (Permanent/Temporary/Biodegradable):

—— Stone, notes:

—— Wood, notes:

—— Other (or already purchased):

—— None

—— Let my survivors choose the memorialization, if any

Winter Burial in Michigan

Winter burials in Michigan are usually possible but may require specialized equipment that incurs a modest fee. A few smaller and more rural cemeteries may not offer winter burial, requiring winter storage in a vault until spring due to intense frost or high snowpack. **Consider documenting your winter burial preferences here,** especially if you have selected a cemetery that you know has limited winter burial options.

End-of-Life Vessel Preferences (Natural Caskets, Shrouds, & More)

There are many different types of vessels made of biodegradable materials that you can use for natural burial.

When exploring your options, consider vessels handcrafted by funerary artisans. These are often comparable (or even lower!) in price to international casket companies, but have a substantially smaller environmental impact and keep money within local communities. Funerary artisans in the region can be found on the following websites:

MICHIGAN DEATHCARE COLLABORATIVE

www.mideathcare.org

FUNERARY ARTISANS COLLECTIVE

www.funeraryartisanscollective.org

Remember that The Funeral Rule gives you the right to secure a vessel directly from third parties, like artisans. It also gives you the right to independently **craft your own vessel** (eg, family quilts or other tapestries can be especially beautiful and meaningful shrouds)! See page 21 of this planner for more on the Funeral Rule.

FOR THE FOLLOWING SECTIONS: *For any item you consider "Not Acceptable," please enter "N/A" in front of it. Prioritize the remaining items, beginning with 1 for most desirable (1, 2, etc.)*

Priority of Acceptable Winter Burial Options

____ Please bury me locally in winter at whatever cemetery offers winter green burial, but preferably at the cemetery listed

But if local winter burial is not possible....

____ Transport body to another cemetery for immediate winter burial

____ please use a green embalming fluid and bury me in the spring only in my preferred cemetery above

____ you can cremate me and bury me in the greenest way still possible

____ you can use a conventional embalming fluid and bury me in the greenest way still possible

____ **Other**:

End-of-Life Vessel Preferences

____ You can use a fabric shroud (and any necessary trundle for carrying/interment)

____ You can use a wood coffin

____ You can use a basket made of wicker or other biodegradable materials

____ You can use a cardboard cremation box or liner from a viewing casket

____ You can use a biodegradable urn for my cremains

____ You can scatter my cremains

____ Other

(Detail any artisans or providers you prefer or document a desire for something crafted at home)

Plan Your Ceremony

***FOR THE FOLLOWING SECTIONS**: For any item you consider "Not Acceptable," please enter "N/A" in front of it. Prioritize the remaining items, beginning with 1 for most desirable (1, 2, 3, etc.)*

Funeral Viewing

_____ Allow public viewing

_____ Allow viewing only by my family & closest survivors/participants

_____ Allow viewing by my immediate family only

_____ Allow viewing by only the following specific person(s):

_____ Allow no viewing - please shroud or casket me completely ASAP

_____ Other considerations:

Priority of Acceptable Locations of Visitation (with or without viewing of the body)

_____ Funeral Home

_____ My own Home

_____ Place of Worship or Other Facility:

_____ Other site(s):

_____ No visitation, please

Priority of Acceptable Officiants

_____ I would like the following person(s) to officiate (include name, contact info, & church or organization)

_____ I would like the officiant to be determined by my place of worship or funeral representative (circle one)

_____ I would like no officiant of any kind, please just bury me and talk amongst yourselves

_____ Other considerations

Other Ceremony Preferences

Note any preferences you have for your funeral ceremony below:

Specific rituals (spiritual, military, other). I would include:

Specific prayers and/or readings. I would like to have included:

Music. I would like to have included:

Flowers or other Decorations. I would like to have included:

I would like any donations to be sent to the following charities

If cremation is an option, I would like the disposition of my cremains to be as follows:

Other things I would like to have included in the ceremony:

☐ I would like no ceremony.
Please just bury me and talk amongst yourselves

Organ/Body Donation or other Special Instructions

If you are interested in organ donation, want to donate your body to science, or have any other special pre-disposition plans, please describe the details of your plans below.



Those interested in possible organ/tissue donation should also register with Gift of Life.

You, your family, and your funeral director will need to make a record of how your preferences should take priority in relation to the above instructions and include all pertinent information to help assure successful completion of your plans.

Death Occurring Out of State/Out of Area

It is entirely possible that you may die out of state or out of your local area, which can add complications to green/natural burial wishes. For example, the extra time it might take to return your body, or a need to transport your body across state lines, could require embalming or prohibitive extra expenses for an appropriate storage case. Please discuss such possibilities with your family and your funeral director, and record below how you would prefer they approach such complications.

Your Obituary

Obituaries are optional, but if you have yours already prepared you can attach it to this document and/or provide electronic copies to your designated agent, primary survivors, and/or preferred funeral director. When you decease, your funeral director can review it with your funeral representative and other survivors and update it if necessary.

If you wish at this time to provide basic information for future preparation of your obituary, please record it below or attach an additional page. Or, your funeral director may have a website where you can enter such information for their records. Typical information includes:

- [ ] Your day or year of birth and birth location
- [ ] Your parents
- [ ] Your spouse and date of marriage
- [ ] Your children (and their spouses/life partners) and grandchildren
- [ ] Your siblings and their spouses/life partners
- [ ] Other special survivors
- [ ] High school and other educational achievements
- [ ] Work history
- [ ] Any involvement in the military/armed forcesfuneral rule
- [ ] Church and membership in other community organizations
- [ ] Organizations to which people can make donations in your name
- [ ] Anything else that reflects important aspects of your life

A Quick Overview of

Bonus Appendix

The Funeral Rule

The Funeral Rule is enforced by the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) and serves to help protect individuals and families. The rule mandates transparency and allows families to choose only the goods and services they want from funeral homes. When effectively exercised, the Funeral Rule can empower families to have funerals that are meaningful and economical. The rule can also facilitate easier access to eco-conscious options. **Familiarize yourself with this rule before meeting with funeral homes.**

Specifically, you have the right to:

1. Only purchase the funeral options you want and need. You are not required to purchase a package that has items you do not want. You can choose individual services (such as embalming or a memorial service) or individual products (like caskets or urns).

2. Receive price information over the phone. Funeral homes are required to provide price details upon request. You do not have to share your personal information beforehand. Although not mandatory, many funeral directors may also make their information available online or snail mail their price lists on request.

3. Receive an itemized, written price list from a funeral home. The funeral home must give you a General Price List (GPL) that is yours to keep. It lists all the items and services offered and their corresponding price.

4. Receive a written price list for caskets before you even see the actual caskets. Although this is sometimes included in the General Price List (GPL), it is often separate. Receiving the casket price list before you see caskets allows you to ask about lower priced options that may not be on display.

For a single-page easy-to-print version of this rule, visit:

www.hickorynutfarmstead.com/planning

5. Receive a written price list for outer burial containers. No state in the U.S. requires outer burial containers, though many cemeteries may mandate them to prevent graves from caving in during landscape maintenance. If the funeral home doesn't list their prices on the GPL but sells containers, you have the right to see a separate price list before you see the actual containers. Again, this list allows you to ask about lower priced options that may not be on display.

6. Receive a written statement about the price of each service and item you are purchasing before you pay. This is required and should include all services, goods, and the total cost.

7. You have a right to an explanation within the written statement for any legal, cemetery, or crematory requirement compelling the purchase of any services or goods that you are being charged for.

8. **You can use an "alternative container" instead of a casket for cremation.** No state or local law requires a casket for cremation. A funeral home that provides cremation as a service must tell you alternatives are available and provide them on request. Alternative containers may be made of cardboard, unfinished wood, pressed wood, or fiberboard.

9. **You have the right to secure a casket, shroud, or urn from elsewhere and not from the funeral home**. Funeral directors are obligated to work with any purchased casket or even one you make yourself. They cannot charge you a fee for this. You are not required to be present when your casket or urn from a third party seller is delivered to a funeral home.

Make your own vessel **OR** check out local funerary artisans for more sustainable options that are comparable in price and support our local economy!

10. **You can make funeral arrangements that do not include embalming**. No state in the country requires routine embalming. Some states (including Michigan!) require embalming in specific rare circumstances, but in most cases, refrigeration or cooling is an acceptable alternative and embalming is not necessary. Some funeral homes may have a policy that requires embalming for public viewing of the body. If preservation is necessary, you can ask if refrigeration is possible. **(See Page 9 for more on embalming and body preservation in Michigan)**

About this Planner

This planner was compiled by Michael Marie, a Michigan-based fiber and funerary artisan and inadvertent deathcare educator.

Michael crafts woven caskets, burial trays, urns, and plant-dyed shrouds with local and sustainably-sourced materials that serve as more eco-conscious and meaningful end-of-life vessels. These are available for families with immediate needs, can be custom-ordered, or can be woven/dyed alongside a skilled artisan.

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Parts of this planner have been adapted with permission from the Keweenaw Green Burial Alliance, a community-based organization dedicated to the support and development of green burial practices in a region of Michigan's upper peninsula.

Parts of this planner have been adapted with permission from our overseas friends in the UK from Dead Good!

Parts of this planner have also been adapted with permission from the Michigan Deathcare Collaborative, a 501(c)3 nonprofit working to re-root the care of our dead in ecosystems and communities.

This zine is freely available to all online, though may be found with a price tag at some locations to cover printing, binding, and distribution costs. Any additional proceeds are donated to the Michigan Deathcare Collaborative, a 501(c)3 nonprofit.