

'Green' Burials Try To Preserve Cycle of Life

Final Resting Spots Honor Dead, Earth

By Elizabeth Birge
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In life, Lou Tafuri loved to fish in the waters off the [New Jersey](#) coast. In death, he sleeps with the fishes. His family couldn't be happier.

Tafuri, who died in 2005, was cremated after donating his body to science. Shortly before the ashes were returned to his daughter Susan Tafuri, she learned of a program that could provide her father with an eternal resting place better-suited to him than an urn.

Today, his remains are part of a concrete ball that helps make up an artificial reef seven miles southeast of Great Egg Inlet, where fish gather, plants grow and anglers fish.

Soon his daughter will be able to visit him: She plans to take diving lessons.

"You're in the ocean; you're back to nature; you're not clogging up land," said Susan Tafuri, whose father, a Navy veteran, had full military honors at the viewing of the reef ball the day before it was deployed. "The majority of people I know never go to the cemetery."

Memorial reefs are part of an emerging movement in the United States toward simpler, less costly, more environmentally friendly burials. The goal is to return individuals to the earth with as little trace or intervention as possible while preserving green space.

Called natural burial or green burial, the practice is generally defined as one in which the body isn't embalmed, is placed in a biodegradable coffin and then set in a grave without a concrete liner.

Cremation, while not a perfect form of natural burial because of the energy required to complete the process and the dioxin and mercury released into the air, is accepted in this category because the remains leave little or no "footprint."

The savings can be significant. The average cost of a traditional funeral is \$6,000, according to the [Federal Trade Commission](#).

The cost of a green burial is less than a third of that, and even lower if it involves cremation and scattering the ashes.

These practices are familiar to those of certain religious faiths whose traditions and laws call for burial as soon as possible after death, with no embalming. While they may be

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environmentally sound, centuries of faith dictate the arrangements, not concerns for open space or a more simplified way of dealing with death.

The first green cemetery opened in 1998 in [South Carolina](#). Since then, a handful have followed, including ones in [California](#), [Florida](#), [Texas](#), [New York](#) and Washington state.

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