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'Green' Burials Try To Preserve Cycle of Life

Everyone in Genevieve Maiberger's family, for example, was buried in the traditional manner, she said, except her husband, who was cremated 10 years ago. But a few years ago, the retired teacher from [Teaneck, N.J.](#), read an article about Greensprings Natural Cemetery in [Upstate New York](#), and she was sold.

"I have always thought that we should preserve the environment," said Maiberger, 81. "I think this natural burial is ideal to make our planet a better place for all of us to live; we're contaminating it every time we bury someone."

Last year, she drove up to Newfield, N.Y., in the [Finger Lakes](#) region to look at Greensprings, almost 100 acres of protected meadow and woods, and left feeling at peace with her decision.

"It's beautiful, and you look out there and you think this is so beautiful and so peaceful and so restful."

Like many other green cemeteries, the operators of Greensprings aspire to the creation of a preserve where nature takes its course and provides nutrients to the life growing above the earth.

"I love the idea of just returning to nature," said Mary Woodsen, president of the cemetery, speaking of her own plans to be buried. "Nature has been taking care of death for a long, long time. I just think it's part of the natural cycle."

At Greensprings, the dead may be buried with or without a coffin. No gravestones are allowed; instead, families may have an engraved fieldstone put atop the grave.

One difference with a natural burial, according to funeral directors, is everything must happen quicker because without embalming, the body begins to decompose immediately.

Mark Harris, author of "Grave Matters: A Journey Through the Modern Funeral Industry to a Natural Way of Burial," believes the new options represent a dramatic change in the way the public thinks about death.

"Baby boomers brought a somewhat environmentally friendly approach to many changes in life," said Harris, who wrote an environmental column for the [Los Angeles Times](#) for 12 years. "They took a natural approach to childbirth; they fueled the appearance of organic grocery stores. I feel that the same will happen as we approach the end of life."

Indeed, eventually Susan Tafuri's father will have company in his underwater setting.

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"I'm going to have one," she said, "and I'm going to put them all in with me, my three dogs and the ashes of another."

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