



Live Green. Die Greener.

Spirit Sanctuary Frequently Asked Questions

🔗 If someone wants to be buried at Spirit Sanctuary what do they need to do?

The best way is to plan ahead. (If you are here because someone is close to death, or has just died, please see below “Can someone who has not planned ahead still be buried at Spirit Sanctuary?”) Burial at Spirit Sanctuary means that you will not be embalmed, that you are in a biodegradable container or shroud, and buried at a depth of approximately 3.5 feet. Being buried in this way is the most natural way for your body to become part of the ecosystem.

We strongly encourage people to include one of our conservation partners in their estate planning. In return for doing so, you get a greatly reduce the cost of burial.

To enroll at Spirit Sanctuary, submit the application (enrollment packet found on our website) and fee to Spirit Sanctuary, PO Box 42, Essex, NY 12936. Once you have enrolled you will then be put in touch with our Spirit Sanctuary Coordinator, who will arrange a phone/video orientation call or in-person meeting with you depending on location. In this orientation, our coordinator will review procedures and preferences for burial at Spirit Sanctuary.

Due to our conservation efforts, we encourage our enrolled members to cultivate a living relationship with Spirit Sanctuary and the larger efforts that you are a part of as a member. The Spirit Sanctuary is not only being protected to allow wildness to reclaim this area but is also a part of a greater effort of protection called the Split Rock Wildway Corridor. This corridor seeks to create an undisrupted tract of land available for wildlife to travel safely and freely from the High Peaks to Lake Champlain. Due to the ever-changing state of these ecosystems and our own evolving states of being, we cannot with honest integrity promise any one location for burial. Therefore, we invite you into intimate relationship with what is and what is becoming within and around you, to foster connection to place and change, and when time draws near for your physical departure, we can support you in choosing your final resting place.

We encourage you to document your wishes to be buried at Spirit Sanctuary and keep your orientation documents with your advance planning documents. In addition, please be sure to share your wishes with loved ones who may be a part of your care.

Unlike conventional cemeteries, we will generally not remove trees or other natural features to accommodate a site (though we may have to temporarily displace a small amount of vegetation as we dig the grave), so your final resting place will be affected by the natural landscape and how the ecosystems evolves.

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However, if you wish to be buried near to another, please see below (can a family plot be selected at Spirit Sanctuary?).

As death approaches, please contact Spirit Sanctuary as soon as possible so we can prepare the gravesite and plan the burial itself. At the Spirit Sanctuary we value the benefits of healing and connection that participating in the burial experience can bring. Family and/or friends are welcome to participate in the opening or closing of the grave and providing pallbearer's. Generally, we need about 48 hours to be ready for a burial.

🌿 Can someone who has not planned ahead still be buried at Spirit Sanctuary?

Yes, but if someone was not enrolled prior to death, you or the family will need to do so before we can proceed with the burial through our Wildway Friend sliding scale option. Making burial plans at time of death is more difficult for everybody involved. We strongly encourage planning ahead, to avoid delays and unnecessary stress at a difficult time.

In addition, we offer a reduced price on burial when a bequest is made to one or more of our conservation partners prior to the death. (See question below: **“How much does burial at Spirit Sanctuary cost?”**) Planning ahead allows you an opportunity to arrange the bequest(s) to conservation group(s) rather than paying the full price.

🌿 Can someone enroll at Spirit Sanctuary for someone else?

If you are someone's Agent of Disposition or next of kin and know that they want to be buried at Spirit Sanctuary or have a green burial, then yes. But, if someone is unable to make burial arrangements for themselves and has documented wishes for another type of burial, then you are obligated to follow their written wishes; and we cannot make arrangements for burial at Spirit Sanctuary.

🌿 How much does burial at Spirit Sanctuary cost?

The cost of burial at Spirit Sanctuary is \$1,200 if you have previously enrolled with Spirit Sanctuary and designated one or more of our partner conservation groups to receive a bequest in your estate planning. If you have not, you can be buried at Spirit Sanctuary for a sliding scale fee of \$2400-\$4000.

We use this two-tiered structure to encourage people to make sure their final act is one of giving—both of their body to Nature, and of some portion of their financial assets, to conserve the ecosystem their body will become a part of.

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A portion of the money from burials at Spirit Sanctuary goes to cover the cost of labor in preparing gravesites, paying our staff, and administration of the green burial area, including a fund for perpetual monitoring to ensure that Spirit Sanctuary forever remains a place of protected habitat. Anything in excess of our operational budget will further our educational and land conservation efforts. As a private burial ground, our mission is to provide people with a burial that honors their wish to “live green, die green.” The financial gifts of people who choose to be buried at Spirit Sanctuary is a reflection of this philosophy.

The land is owned by a land trust 501©(3) and as such is protected by a dissolution clause. We believe that investing in local conservation and education will additionally create a strong community around this wild place, to forever value and hold this land sacred.

As a consumer everyone has the right to change their mind about where they want to be buried. Please notify our office if you need to make this change. In the event plans change, all but \$450 processing fee will be refunded. Please note that all burials at Spirit Sanctuary are considered a final mode of disposition. This means we will not disinter a body without a court order.

🌿 Can someone be buried at Spirit Sanctuary if they want to be embalmed?

No. Green burial involves doing as little as possible to interfere with the natural process of decomposition that occurs when a body is placed in healthy soil. Embalming, even with so-called “green embalming fluid”, disrupts that process.

Embalming is never required by law, even when transporting a body across state lines (with the exception of Alabama and Arkansas). However, some common carriers do require embalming if the body is coming from Minnesota, Idaho, Nebraska, Nevada, North Dakota, and Wyoming.

Please note that transport by airplane, or even long car drives, does leave a substantial carbon footprint that is not offset by green burial. If such arrangements are necessary for the body to reach Spirit Sanctuary, it is best for the environment to consider green burial closer to home.

🌿 Can someone be buried at Spirit Sanctuary if they want to be cremated?

For many years’ cremation was thought to be better for the environment than conventional burial practices such as embalming. However, we now know that a large amount of fossil fuel is used in each cremation, releasing various pollutants including greenhouse gasses, which are upsetting our planet’s fragile climate. Furthermore, cremains (ashes) have a pH of about 11.4 and are devoid of any nutrients accessible to the soil. For these reasons, we strongly discourage people who want to be buried at Spirit Sanctuary from choosing cremation. If a person previously enrolled in Spirit Sanctuary needs to be cremated for some reason, then they may still take advantage of the burying of their ashes in their reserved site after the ashes are amended.

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🌿 Can someone bury their pet at Spirit Sanctuary?

Sanctuary welcomes pet burials for those who are enrolled at Spirit Sanctuary for an additional \$200. Please notify Spirit Sanctuary Coordinator of your intentions. Please note that Spirit Sanctuary has the right to limit the number of pet burials per individual/family. Pet owners are required to open and close the graves themselves in the presence of a Spirit Sanctuary steward. Markers may be placed in accordance with the regulations below (see question: **Can I have a marker or other decorations at my gravesite?**)

🌿 Can a family plot be selected at Spirit Sanctuary?

Absolutely, being near to loved ones is an option. Due to our conservation mission and efforts, we will not impede on the Spirit Sanctuary evolving ecosystem and as such, cannot confirm availability of certain spots. Your preference to be near to a loved one will be documented and honored to the best of the lands ability at the time of need. This can be specified in your preferences upon enrollment.

Each person enrolled will have his/her/their own burial site and each burial will be treated as though it was a single enrollment.

🌿 What happens at the time of death?

We ask that you notify Spirit Sanctuary as soon as possible when death is imminent by calling the current coordinator or Spirit Sanctuary office. This allows us to prepare for the burial and be ready on your schedule as it can take up to 48 hours to coordinate and prepare the site. We encourage families to assist in the opening (digging) and closing of the grave. Although hard work, this experience is rewarding. Spirit Sanctuary representatives will be available for assistance as needed, and with advanced notice, provide additional people to assist in carrying and lowering the body.

The deceased will need to be transported to Spirit Sanctuary. If you live in New York State, you will be required to work with a funeral director to obtain the Burial-Transport Permit or have the Funeral home transport. Additionally, if you live in New York State and the person dies in a hospital, nursing home, or similar institution, you must use a funeral director to remove the body from the premises, even if you are going to care for the body yourself. We recommend that you contact a funeral director who is familiar with our process. This can be discussed at orientation.

You have the right to care for your own dead. This means you may bathe, cool, and prepare the body for burial yourself. Basic education about caring for your own dead can be covered in your orientation upon request.

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Keep in mind that where someone dies may impact your choices- nursing homes and hospitals will not allow a dead body to stay in its bed for more than a few hours. In these cases, you will need access to a home or apartment in which to care for the body or use the services at a funeral home.

Bodies must arrive at Spirit Sanctuary in good condition, so please follow the protocol for proper cooling techniques, transportation, and timelines explained in your orientation.

Burial at Spirit Sanctuary does not preclude any church or other formal ceremonies taking place before, at, or after burial. You are also welcomed to choose family directed ceremonies or funerals. If you would like support in ceremony/service planning this can be discussed at orientation and referral to said services can be shared.

When the body and family are ready for burial, there are many options for transporting the body to Spirit Sanctuary and then to the gravesite. Motorized vehicles are not allowed in Spirit Sanctuary itself, but families can arrange to have a horse-drawn wagon carry the body to gravesite from the pre-burial gathering or entrance. Please note that not all grave locations can accommodate the horse drawn carriage, please discuss with steward for prior approval. If approved, please contact Josh Smith directly at (617)312-1269. Alternatively, the body can be carried with a carrier board provided, from the entrance to gravesite. If transporting the body yourselves, please have four to six strong, healthy, people available (if this is not feasible for you, please tell us in advance so we can arrange for our stewards to assist). Our gravedigger will have the grave open and the area around the grave readied for families to gather at the gravesite. Remember, this is wild (though gentle) land, so you'll be more comfortable in outdoor wear.

Please note that although we try our best to be accommodating for all needs, those with mobility assistance needs may not be able to access all areas of Spirit Sanctuary, mainly areas far off the main trail and through our seasonally wet area.

Bodies are lowered into the grave by hand. Again, we recommend four to six strong people participate in the lowering, and we can arrange to have our stewards assist if needed. We encourage families to take their time at the gravesite and at least begin the process of closing the grave themselves; however, our grave digger can also close the grave if the family prefers.

Once the family is done at the gravesite, they are free to go. Families and loved ones are welcome to visit Spirit Sanctuary and the gravesite at any time. Because all of the dirt that was dug to make the grave is replaced, a small mound will mark the gravesite. This mound subsides over time. We encourage letting nature select which plants will cover the gravesite, however, families are allowed to plant native species of flowers and/or a tree on the gravesite if they wish, with prior approval of plant and planting supervision from steward. Anything planted on or around the gravesite must be a locally sourced native species, excepting that we welcome recovery of

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American Chestnut and other regionally, native trees that may in the future be knocked back by human- introduced pathogens, even if the restoration sources are not in our immediate area. Please request list of plants and nurseries from Spirit Sanctuary Stewards if interested in this option.

🌿 If we choose to keep the body at home until burial, how should the body be prepared for burial at Spirit Sanctuary?

This is covered in detail in your orientation upon request. If you plan to care for your loved one at home, burial must take place within four days of death or else the body must be transferred to a funeral home. If stored at a funeral home, burial must take place within two weeks of death, or as stated by the funeral home you are working with. Proper care of the body after death, though not difficult, must be taken very seriously.

You may prepare the body yourself, hire a home funeral guide to provide guidance, or a funeral director to assist. Please be sure that the funeral director is aware that they are preparing a body for a green burial. (This is covered in your orientation.)

Please note that in New York State there is no preservation time requirement for home funeral families and a licensed funeral director must supervise the funeral services and the interment.

Bodies buried at Spirit Sanctuary are not embalmed and should be wearing clothes of natural material (if possible). Please remove anything that you do not want buried with the person such as eyeglasses and rings. Please do not use any sort of plastic decorations on the body.

Bodies can be in a biodegradable container (such as a pine or other softwood box or “alternative,” cardboard, container). Some metal in the container (such as hinges or handles) is acceptable, but we prefer all-natural containers.

Bodies can also be shrouded. A shrouded body does not need to be dressed, but if it is, please try to make sure that both the clothing and the shroud are made of natural materials (if possible). You can purchase a shroud or use bedding, or a family quilt, as long as they are of (mostly) natural material. A video of the shrouding process can be viewed from our website.

Burying a deceased person naked at Spirit Sanctuary is acceptable, provided that is the expressed wish of the person. Everyone at the ceremony should be aware and respectful of their choice.

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🌿 Can I have a marker or other decorations at my gravesite?

If a marker is desired it must be of wood or a naturally occurring local stone, and 100 pounds or less. Letters and numbers may be carved on the stone but the stone itself should retain its natural shape and not be polished. We ask that all markers lay flat on the grave, not erected. No unnatural items (such as plastic flowerpots, Mylar balloons, etc) are to be left at Spirit Sanctuary overnight. Any items in violation will be removed without notice. For the sake of your time and efforts, please contact Spirit Sanctuary to ensure your chosen marker complies with our guidelines.

Spirit Sanctuary will not “maintain” gravesites. The intention is for nature to reclaim the burial areas. Most likely this will result in a forest. Friends and family may, if they wish, weed and water to encourage specific native plants and to discourage non-native plants. No pesticides of any kind are to be used on the site. Native animals are welcome to use this habitat. We will not remove, trap, or kill native animals that also call Spirit Sanctuary ‘home.’ For instance, beaver may re-appropriate trees for their own purposes, this is a natural process and will not be discouraged. Wire may be placed around special trees, if desired. Not all areas of the sanctuary are going to be easily accessible due to weather conditions. Spirit Sanctuary does not guarantee access to gravesites due to snow, mud, water, or other natural occurrences.

We encourage letting nature select which plants will cover the gravesite. However, if you feel strongly compelled to purchase a plant for the gravesite it must be a plant that is native to Essex County, New York. (Not just a “native” plant sold in Essex County.) If using a purchased plant, rinse the soil from the roots and carry it to Spirit Sanctuary “bare root.” This will help prevent unwanted organisms from entering the conservation area. Please note that a Spirit Sanctuary Steward will need to approve and supervise the planting. Stewards can support in providing native plant list and possibly nurseries to work with.

🌿 Can someone be buried at Spirit Sanctuary if they are not a resident of Essex County, NY?

Yes! In fact, you do not even need to be a resident of New York State to be buried at Spirit Sanctuary. In your orientation our Spirit Sanctuary Coordinator will review the steps necessary to transport your body to Spirit Sanctuary from nearby states.

However, keep in mind the carbon footprint of transportation and consider seeking a green burial location closer to home. You can find a directory of green burial sites at: greenburialcouncil.org or greenburialnaturally.org.

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🌿 What conservation groups are on your list of partners to whom donations or bequests should be made?

Our lead partners in Split Rock Wildway conservation include:

Northeast Wilderness Trust
Champlain Area Trails
Eddy Foundation
Adirondack Land Trust
Adirondack Council
Protect the Adirondacks
Adirondack Wild
Old-Growth Forest Network
The Rewilding Institute
Wildlands Network
New Land Trust

You may also, or instead, choose any legitimate non-profit land and/or wildlife conservation group. This organization will need to be approved. With groups other than those listed above, Spirit Sanctuary has not beforehand explained how the green burial/ charitable donation process works; so there may be some extra work on your end.

🌿 What should someone bring to a burial at Spirit Sanctuary? What should they wear?

There are three things that must be present for a burial at Spirit Sanctuary, the Burial-Transport Permit, the body (prepared for a green burial), and yourself.

Spirit Sanctuary will provide everything necessary for the burial and, with advance notice, even additional people to assist in carrying and lowering the body. We do not have tents, so bring umbrellas if it is raining and wear hats and sunscreen if it is sunny. Burials take place between sunrise and sunset, but you may wish to bring a flashlight in order to make your way safely out of the cemetery in low light.

You should bring any native and natural items that will play a role in the ceremony at the grave or that you wish to leave after the grave is closed. Again items left will have to be pre-approved by Spirit Sanctuary Steward.

While we are used to dressing formally for funerals, please consider that Spirit Sanctuary is outdoors and not maintained, except for the main trail. Sneakers or hiking shoes will be a better fit than dress shoes or heels. If you are planning to assist in digging the grave be sure to wear something appropriate for outdoor labor. If you are going to assist in opening or closing the

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grave, wear something appropriate for outdoor labor and bring work gloves that fit you. We recommend dressing in a way that feels respectful to the person, the surroundings, the season, and the ceremony.

🌿 What if someone dies in the winter? Can they still be buried at Spirit Sanctuary?

Yes, Spirit Sanctuary is open for burial year-round. Generally, in winter, we can shovel a path to the gravesite and around the grave. If necessary, our gravedigger will thaw the ground to open the grave. He will pile the soil from the grave on top of the snow to facilitate closing the grave. He will not shovel snow from the grave once it is closed. Be aware that it may not be possible to reach a reserved site in the winter. If this is the case a Spirit Sanctuary director will help you choose a new, permanent, site.

🌿 What if someone dies on a holiday?

Death has no holidays and neither do we at Spirit Sanctuary.

🌿 What if someone changes their mind about being buried at Spirit Sanctuary?

As a consumer everyone has the right to change their mind about where they want to be buried. Please notify our office if you need to make this change. All but \$450 processing fee will be returned.

Please note that all burials at Spirit Sanctuary are considered a final mode of disposition. This means we will not disinter a body without a court order.

🌿 What support does Spirit Sanctuary provide to people considering burial there?

The Spirit Sanctuary stewards are available to talk you through the enrollment process, to help in preparing gravesites, assisting at funerals, running the website and answering emails. As a small group of people passionate about conservation and rewilding, any one of our stewards will be happy to talk to you about why burial at Spirit Sanctuary is an important part of supporting our environment.

We have a Spirit Sanctuary Coordinator. As part of your enrollment at Spirit Sanctuary, the coordinator will arrange a phone orientation call or in-person orientation meeting with you. In this orientation they will review the procedure of burial at Spirit Sanctuary, what to do when death is near, your option to care for your own dead, review the forms you need to sign, go over your options for ceremony, transport, and what happens in the cemetery, and answer questions you have.

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🌿 **Will animals bother the grave?**

Depth may vary slightly, but 3.5 feet is optimal in encouraging natural decomposition as well as creating an odor barrier deep enough from the top of the body to the ground surface. For more information on soil science please go to greenburialcouncil.org and peruse their resources.

🌿 **What if I still have questions?**

If you want to learn more about burial at Spirit Sanctuary than the information we provide here, and on our website, please call and leave a message at 518-278-7502, or by email to spiritsanctuaryburial@gmail.com. A Spirit Sanctuary staff person will then talk to you about choosing a site, review the price structure, and answer questions you might have about choosing Spirit Sanctuary.

Other Resources:

- The National Home Funeral Alliance keeps a directory of End of Life Doulas and Home Funeral Guides should you wish to find someone in your own area to support you through your loved one's dying process and/or in caring for your own dead. (End of Life Doulas and Home Funeral Guide trainings can vary widely, so we also suggest that you ensure the person you choose to work with is familiar with green burial.)
- The Funeral Consumers Alliance provides resources on state laws about funeral and burial laws and your rights as a funeral consumer. If you suspect that the information you are hearing is incorrect, please contact them. Remember green burial is legal in all 50 states.
- For additional resources including books and articles about green burial and conservation, links to hospice, and advance care planning please see our website.

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