

Frequently Asked Questions

Overview: Foxfield Preserve is a nonprofit cemetery under the Internal Revenue Service code 501(c)(13). It is completely controlled by The Wilderness Center (TWC), a nonprofit organization operating under Internal Revenue Service code 501(c)(3). So, both are not-for-profit organizations. Foxfield Preserve is more than a cemetery it is also a nature preserve. TWC is a nature center and land trust.

A nature preserve cemetery accomplishes many goals. It is an economical alternative to modern burial. It is much more environmentally friendly. Far fewer resources are consumed in a natural burial and the nature preserve returns services to the community and the world by providing wildlife habitat, a clean watershed, clean air, and walking trails. Over time Foxfield Preserve will be restored to become a beautiful nature preserve with tall forests and beautiful prairie meadows.

Foxfield Preserve's location on a hilltop provides a scenic view of the surrounding landscape. The view includes the Sugar Creek valley and Amish farmland.

1. What is a nature preserve cemetery?

A nature preserve cemetery is NOT a lawn type cemetery. A nature preserve cemetery bears little resemblance to what people normally think of as a cemetery.

Foxfield Preserve is a nature preserve first. People also happen to be interred there. It will look like The Wilderness Center. Trails will meander through forest and prairie. As the land is being restored to a natural condition, the forest areas will take several years to grow. The prairie areas will be restored to native grasses and wildflowers more quickly.

Burial plots are very low density. A typical modern cemetery places burials as tightly as possible. Over 1,000 burials per acre is common. In a nature preserve cemetery density runs much lower from 100 to 200 per acre.

“Green” or “natural” or “conservation” burial techniques are used in a nature preserve cemetery. (See # 3 below).

2. Is this a completely new concept?

No. TWC is the first nonprofit conservation organization to establish a nature preserve cemetery. The first such cemetery is Ramsey Creek. It is located in South Carolina and operated by Memorial Ecosystems. Nature Preserve Cemeteries are fairly common in the United Kingdom where real estate is even more limited than in the United States.

3. What is a “Natural Burial?” (also referred to as “green burial” or “conservation burial”)

This is how everyone was buried throughout most of human history. Modern burial techniques with steel or bronze coffins and concrete vaults are actually quite modern. Aside from the Egyptian Pharaohs, embalming only became common around the time of the Civil War.

In a natural burial, a person is laid to rest in a biodegradable container such as a shroud, blanket, wooden box, or even cardboard cremation box. They are not embalmed. The concept is that the person's molecules are moved more quickly back into nature's cycles. It is the true “dust to dust” form of burial. Foxfield Preserve encourages you to dress the body in natural fibers such as cotton or wool.

4. If you require biodegradable materials, what about medical prosthesis?

While Foxfield Preserve wishes to be as natural as possible this is not an ecological concern. Such devices are carefully designed to be biologically inert to prevent the immune system from attacking them. It is neither practical nor environmentally necessary to remove them.

5. Is “Conservation Burial,” “Natural Burial,” or “Green Burial” legal?

Yes.

99% of what you may think is a law is either the rules of individual cemeteries or things we have assumed due to common, modern practice. For example, there is no law that a vault must be used, but many cemeteries require this to make maintenance easier and to make it possible to pack gravesites more densely. Embalming is not a law.

6. Doesn't embalming preserve a body for all time?

No. It only slows decomposition. The chemicals used (mostly ethyl alcohol and formaldehyde) can (and will) be processed by the environment. They effectively preserve a body for a relatively short period of time. The Bible (Genesis 3:19) is correct about “dust to dust.”

7. Doesn't embalming prevent disease?

When a person is embalmed, his or her blood is drained. If disease were a concern, special steps would have to be taken. Pathogens (with a few rare exceptions) depend upon living tissues. They are parasites. When the body dies, the pathogens die as well. The soil flora can deal with pathogens.

8. Can I have a viewing if the body is not embalmed?

This is something to discuss with your funeral director. Some funeral directors are reluctant to have a viewing of an unembalmed body. Other funeral directors are willing to work with you to use refrigeration, dry ice for other techniques to allow a viewing.

9. Why would TWC get involved with a nature preserve cemetery?

TWC is creating a new kind of regional conservation organization. Initially, TWC was only a nature center. In the 1990s the Center became a land trust conserving land through conservation easements. As the 21st Century opened, TWC began to conserve wetlands through wetland mitigation. Foxfield Preserve is an activity that makes sense. The land will serve double duty. First it will be restored to provide habitat for native plants and animals. Second it will serve as a beautiful place people may choose as a final resting place. With its trail system, visitors may walk in the beauty of nature while visiting family gravesites.

10. What does TWC do with income from Foxfield Preserve?

The Center has always had a two-part mission: Education and Conservation. Income from Foxfield Preserve will be used to benefit the community by supporting that mission. Among the many things it will support are:

Land acquisition along the Sugar Creek Biodiversity Corridor and other key tracts to increase TWC's “island” size and connections. This will provide long-term habitat security to a wide range of native species.

TWC endowment fund (endowment earnings are spent to advance the mission, the principal is never spent so that the Center's mission is supported in perpetuity).

Enhance/subsidize the educational programming for schools and families.

11. What about site restoration?

The site of Foxfield Preserve was once farmland. The Wilderness Center acquired the land with ecological restoration in mind. Part of the site will be restored in native prairie species. It will be dominated by tall grass, warm season species. In late summer, the prairie section will be spectacular as native wildflowers bloom in profusion. The prairie areas will be located higher on the hill to afford wonderful views of the countryside. The balance of Foxfield Preserve will be reforested. When the settlers arrived in this area, it was predominately forested. The site will again be forest. In 20 years, there will be "pole" timber; in 150 years, the site will be in the early stages of old growth forest. In 500 years it will be a rare treasure of ancient trees.

12. Can I help with restoration?

Yes. The Wilderness Center often uses volunteers to help with restoration projects. There will likely be work using prescribed burning on the prairie. Eliminating invasive, non-native species will be an on-going job. There will always be a certain amount of trail maintenance. Clients will also be encouraged to help with restoration through planting of native trees and wildflowers. You may be able to purchase a tree or wildflower (depending on the location) to plant near your plot.

13. What about maintenance of the cemetery?

Remember, it is a nature preserve FIRST. There will be very little maintenance compared to a regular lawn-type cemetery. We will maintain the trails exactly as the existing TWC trails are maintained. Remember, if the site looks like a modern cemetery, we have failed. It will look just like the rest of TWC...forest and prairie.

14. What about funerals?

Foxfield Preserve is NOT a funeral home. Arrangements for funeral services are best handled by professionals or the family. Foxfield Preserve will try to cooperate as much as possible. Memorial services held on site are welcome although facilities are limited. Rooms in the Interpretive Building may be available for rent. However, The Wilderness Center will not accept rentals for displaying bodies. TWC suggests you consider holding a memorial in good weather some months following the burial when everyone can see Foxfield Preserve and enjoy walking the trails.

15. What about cremation?

Yes. Foxfield Preserve will accept cremation remains. Some parts of the preserve will be limited to burials of cremation remains. If people wish to simply scatter ashes, there will be a cost for record keeping. (Over the years many people have scattered the ashes of loved ones at TWC.)

16. What about grave markers?

Grave markers are permitted, but optional. Marker standards are designed so they enhance the wildlife habitat in addition to the memorial function. Our criteria will be: granite glacial erratics, not polished, may be engraved, natural looking edges (not sawed square), lays flat on the ground with approximately 216 square inches exposed (12"x18"), extending only about three inches above grade. It is intended that markers will also serve an ecological function.

17. How deep are graves?

Six-feet-deep is a myth. Few cemeteries, if any, actually dig that deep. It is important to have the burial deep enough, but not too deep as to delay the return to nature. At Foxfield Preserve, organic material such as leaves and twigs may be mixed with soil replaced in graves to facilitate site restoration.

18. Will animals dig in the graves?

This is a myth. Burial is an ancient practice. Pioneer cemeteries in places with bears, wolves, coyotes, and wild hogs were not bothered.

19. Is this against anyone's religion?

Considering the diversity of religious beliefs that is a tough question. It does not conflict with any major religions. Natural burial is in keeping with nature and even the oldest burial traditions.

20. Don't bodies have to be embalmed for transportation?

For transporting bodies, dry ice is acceptable in all but a few states. Click here to see State Laws.

21. What about water pollution? Won't bodies pollute the water or ground water?

No. A nature preserve cemetery will improve water quality. The forest and prairie watershed of Foxfield Preserve will produce cleaner water in the Sugar Creek watershed. Natural land produces cleaner water than any other source. Compare a nature preserve watershed to urban, suburban, or agricultural runoff. Modern cemetery gravesites have drains to assure that vaults don't fill with water. Even with embalming chemicals these do not create a water quality hazard.

22. How can I locate a gravesite on a nature preserve?

Foxfield Preserve is required to keep careful records of precise burial locations. These records will be kept on paper and electronically. Foxfield Preserve will even use modern GPS technology to assist. Even if someone elects to have no memorial stone, the gravesite can be located.

23. How can I purchase a site at Foxfield Preserve?

All you need to do is contact the Foxfield Preserve Steward. You can do that by Jennifer Quinn, Preserve Steward at jennifer@wildernesscenter.org or calling 330-763-1331. From time to time information sessions will be held at The Wilderness Center. You can arrange for a visit to select a site or the Steward can help you select a site if you are unable to visit. Keep an eye on this website as photos and maps will be added in the future. We **STRONGLY** suggest that you contact Foxfield Preserve **BEFORE** contacting a funeral provider.

24. What resources can help me read up on my own?

Read the book *Grave Matters: A Journey Through the Modern Funeral Industry to a Natural Way of Burial* by Mark Harris it is available through libraries and bookstores.

<http://www.greenburialcouncil.org/> (this is a start-up nonprofit attempting to create standards) (Foxfield Preserve is applying for certification and intends to meet or exceed their published standards.)

<http://www.memorialecosystems.com/> This is the website of the first nature preserve cemetery started in the U.S. It is a wonderful place and the inspiration to everyone considering this option. The people who started Memorial Ecosystems have been supportive consultants to TWC in starting Foxfield Preserve.

<http://www.foxfieldpreserve.org> to learn more about the nature preserve cemetery at The Wilderness Center.