



Bluestem

BURIAL PLANNING GUIDE

Thank you for your interest in Bluestem. We know that making your own or a loved one's burial plans is a personal and involved process. This document will help guide you through the key steps of planning for burial at Bluestem. Please take your time to read and move through the process. For questions, please find our staff contact information at the end of this document.

1. Getting to know Bluestem Conservation Cemetery

An important first step in determining whether Bluestem is a good fit for you and your family is **to visit Bluestem**. In addition to a conservation cemetery for natural burial, Bluestem is an **active nature preserve open every day from dawn to dusk** for hiking, birding, dog-walking, meditating, and experiencing nature. You are welcome to visit without making an appointment.

At 87 acres, Bluestem is a very large natural area with a lot of ground to cover. We always recommend wearing good walking shoes, a hat, bug spray, and bringing a water bottle when visiting. Find a self-guided tour route on the [Explore on Your Own webpage](#).

In addition to experiencing Bluestem on your own, we encourage you to:

- **Join an online information session** for detailed information about burial at Bluestem. Please find upcoming dates and register on our [Information Sessions webpage](#).
- **Join a guided, informational tour**. Sign up for an upcoming tour at our website (see [Informational Tours](#)). If anyone in your party needs mobility assistance, please email us at reservations@bluestemcemetery.org about next available golf cart tours.

We encourage all those at the beginning of their research to become familiar with the unique **opportunities and limitations of natural burial in a conservation cemetery**. Bluestem operates very differently from a conventional cemetery (see [Cemetery Standards and Guidelines](#)). The nonprofit **Bluestem Community** guides and directs its conservation mission (see [Conservation](#)) while operating the cemetery. Every volunteer, donor, and supporter, and every person choosing burial at Bluestem commits to its mission of restoring the land, protecting our water sources, and providing wildlife habitat for generations to come.

Natural burial at Bluestem is simple and respectful. It occurs without embalming, metals, plastics, concrete, or synthetic materials. Natural burial is encouraged, but ash burial is also permitted with some conservation constraints. Ash scattering is not permitted. Burial containers and cloths must be biodegradable. In this way, natural burial reduces the use of fossil fuels and unnecessary waste, protects soil health, and promotes ecological regeneration.

Natural burial at Bluestem is a participatory process. Families craft and bring the rituals of their choice to the burial service. Guided by Bluestem staff and volunteers, families are invited to actively participate in lowering and closing the grave, if they choose. Graves naturally settle into the landscape. Families are encouraged to return to the nature preserve as often as they like.

2. Burial Reservations with Bluestem

Making arrangements for burial at Bluestem is more than purchasing a cemetery plot; it is an investment in the permanent protection and restoration of this important conservation area and community space.

If you have questions or are ready to make arrangements with us, please **complete one of two Burial Interest Forms** on our website. Find these forms on our [How It Works](#) webpage.

- For **Future Burial**, complete a [Burial Interest Form](#).
- For **Immediate Need Burial** complete an [Immediate Need Form](#).

Our staff will then contact you to schedule an informational phone call or a Reservations Appointment. At your [Reservations Appointment](#), Bluestem staff will answer any questions you have and help complete your reservation. This includes:

- Confirming your choice of **natural burial or ash burial**.
- Helping you **select a burial plot** in one of the five areas currently open for burial, which include woodland and grassland options.
- Providing guidance about **burial containers**. While Bluestem does not sell any caskets, shrouds, or burial trays, we keep samples on site and can connect you with the makers for direct purchase. Please request a copy of our *Burial Container Standards and Specifications* if you wish to make your own container or find another maker.
- Completing a **burial contract** and payment to reserve your desired plot. **Payment must be made at the time of the appointment to reserve your desired plot.**

Bluestem burial plots can be reserved for an individual, a family, or a group. Plots can accommodate combinations such as a natural and ash burial, as well as pet burial, for additional fees. Please speak with staff directly about these options. In any arrangement, *each individual* planning for burial at Bluestem pays their own **burial right** and their own **burial fee**. These amounts are evaluated on an annual basis. Read on for more information about burial costs.

3. Understanding burial costs

Burial costs at Bluestem are divided into two elements: **Burial Rights** and **Burial Fees**.

Burial rights are charged *at the time of reservation* and cover a burial right within a reserved plot. Rights go toward the cemetery's upkeep and operations, as well as Bluestem's Perpetual Care Fund. For natural burial, rights are \$4000. For ash burial, rights are \$1700.

Burial fees are additional and are charged *only at the time of service*. Burial fees cover: site preparation, opening and closing of the grave, and staff support on the day of burial. For natural burial, fees are \$1300. For ash burial, fees are \$650.

In total, the full cost for **Natural Burial at Bluestem is \$5300**; the full cost for **Ash Burial at Bluestem is \$2350**. This covers: an individual's burial rights; site preparation in the cemetery; opening and closing of graves; staff assistance with burial arrangements; staff assistance in

preparing a burial service; up to three hours of staff support for a weekday burial; use of Bluestem’s natural sanctuaries; use of Bluestem wildflowers, grasses, or other natural materials for the burial service; and use of the Bluestem barn on the day of service.

Payment is expected to complete a reservation, and can be made by check, ACH, money order or credit card. Credit cards require an additional 3% processing fee.

Payment plans are available for those who cannot afford to pay the full cost of a reservation at one time. Additional fees are required to establish a payment plan. Please speak with staff if a payment plan is necessary for securing your reservation. Financial assistance may be available to qualifying individuals through the Bluestem Community Fund. Find more information about [the Fund](#) online.

One burial area at Bluestem, the Woodland Edge, contains a limited number of very popular sites. Edgeland plots require a \$2000 donation to the Bluestem Community Fund in addition to the purchase of a burial right. At a scheduled appointment, staff can direct you to available plots in this area, and review the purchase process with you.

Additional burial fees may be required for: weekend burial services, burial services outside regular business hours, required additional staff or volunteer hours, and administrative updates to burial contracts.

4. Making arrangements with other service providers

For those who find Bluestem compatible with their values, it may be a *final destination*; it is not, however, a funeral home. Individuals planning for burial at Bluestem **must also independently make arrangements for:**

- Purchasing or making a burial container
- After-death care
- Shrouding or casketing the deceased
- Filing for the death certificate
- Notifying family members
- Planning and leading any funeral services or graveside rituals
- Transporting the body to the cemetery

Families must work with a **funeral home, home funeral guide**, and/or an **alternative transportation service** to make these arrangements. For burial services, families can honor and remember their loved one as they wish. They can, but are not required to, engage **Officiants, Musicians, Grief Support Guides, Casket Makers, or other service providers** as they plan.

Bluestem keeps a list of independent service providers who have previously supported Bluestem families on our website—see [Service Providers](#). Another excellent resource for green burial education is the website of the National Funeral Consumers Alliance. North Carolina has a vibrant chapter, helmed by Sara Williams of Shrouding Sisters.

When the time comes, Bluestem staff work with the family's designated point of contact to schedule the burial service. Families are welcome to bring in the processions, music, rituals, and traditions that are meaningful to them. Bluestem staff and volunteers prepare the gravesite and/or natural sanctuary, guide the parking, invite and support the family in lowering and closing the grave, and clean up the burial area. We conduct burial services in rain or shine. After the service, families are welcome to hold a reception under the Bluestem barn or wander Bluestem. Once everyone leaves the area, nature resets. See [Planning a Service](#) for more.

5. Memorializing at Bluestem

Remembering loved ones at Bluestem is very important to us. Every person buried at Bluestem has a simple, metal grave marker placed in the center of the grave with their full name and dates. Every grave is accounted for in Bluestem's Cemetery records, and families are given GPS coordinates to the burial plot.

Families may additionally choose to lay a flat, natural gravestone at their loved one's grave after burial. Gravestones are made of natural North Carolina flagstone and are provided by Bluestem to the family at no cost. The family works with a local engraver of their choice. See [Grave Markers and Stones](#).

For burials in the grasslands, staff provide wildflower seeds for scattering after closing the grave. In the woods, we provide ferns from nearby areas and await the natural ephemerals appearing in the spring.

Bluestem staff control all plantings on the property with strict rules for how we manage the land and the cemetery. Bluestem *does not allow* plantings on graves, benches installed at gravesites, or items left on graves. See [Cemetery Standards and Guidelines](#) for more detail and guidance on the simple, biodegradable materials such as flowers that can be left at a gravesite.

Memorial gifts can be made in honor of loved ones to Bluestem's native plants restoration programs. Bluestem families are invited to take part in planned conservation activities under Bluestem's guidance and to return as often as they like to the nature preserve, which itself becomes a living memorial to their loved one.

We thank you for considering Bluestem. We make no assumptions that a conservation cemetery is the right fit for everyone, and we always consider it an honor to be part of a meaningful farewell for those who choose this special place. Please reach out to us if we can be helpful.

The Bluestem Team

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