



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 is intended to help guide you through some of the key information and decisions related to planning for burial at Bluestem. Our staff is also here to help; please find our 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 and experience it** (see [Visit](#)). It is a very large natural area — 87 acres, so we recommend good walking shoes, a hat, and a water bottle. Bluestem is open to the public every day from dawn to dusk, so you are welcome to visit anytime without making an appointment with us. It is a beautiful place for a walk, bird-watching, or silent meditation, and folks often enjoy simply experiencing the land on their own before making any decisions.

In addition to experiencing Bluestem on your own, you can join a **guided, informational walking tour** offered regularly by our knowledgeable Bluestem volunteers. Please sign up for an upcoming tour at our website (see [Walking Tours](#)). If anyone in your party needs mobility assistance or you would prefer a private golf-cart tour with staff, please **request a private informational tour** by emailing us at reservations@bluestemcemetery.org.

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** like Bluestem, which operates differently from a conventional cemetery (see [Cemetery Standards and Guidelines](#)).

Bluestem is an **active nature preserve** for hiking, birding, dog-walking, experiencing nature, meditating, and volunteering, as well as a **conservation cemetery for natural burial**. Bluestem is operated by the nonprofit **Bluestem Community**, and it is guided by its conservation mission (see [Conservation](#)). Every volunteer, donor, and supporter, and every person choosing burial at Bluestem takes part in Bluestem's conservation mission of restoring the land, protecting our water sources, and providing wildlife habitat for generations to come.

Natural burial at Bluestem is a simple, natural process. 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 unnecessary waste from going into the land, protects soil health, and promotes ecological regeneration.

Natural burial at Bluestem is also a participatory process. Families craft and bring the rituals of their choice to the burial. Guided by Bluestem staff and volunteers, families are invited to actively participate in lowering and closing the grave, if they choose. Graves then naturally

settle into the landscape, and families are encouraged to return to the nature preserve as often as they like.

2. Making arrangements 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. Whether you are seeking **Immediate Burial** or making plans for **Future Burial**, Bluestem staff can help you complete your reservations.

Immediate Burial arrangements are handled on a case-by-case basis by contacting heidi@bluestemcemetery.org or jeff@bluestemcemetery.org.

To make a **Future Burial** reservation, please begin by filling out a [Burial Interest Form](#) on our website. You will then be contacted to schedule an appointment with Bluestem staff.

At your [Bluestem Appointment](#), Bluestem staff can answer any questions you may have and help you complete your reservation. This includes:

- Confirming your choice of **natural burial or ash burial**.
- Helping you **select a burial plot** in one of the four areas currently open for burial, which include woodland and grassland options (see [Burial Areas](#)).
- 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. We can also provide you with our *Burial Container Standards and Specifications* if you wish to make your own 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 cremated remains burial. 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. More information about costs is available on our website (see [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 Bluestem's operations and Perpetual Care Fund. For natural burial, rights are \$4000. For ash burial, rights are \$1700.

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

In total, the cost for **Natural Burial at Bluestem is \$5300**, and the cost for **Ash Burial at Bluestem is \$2350**. This covers: an individual's burial rights; fees for opening and closing a grave; staff assistance in making 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 for a reception.

Payment is expected to complete a reservation, and can be made by check, 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.

There is one burial area at Bluestem, the Woodland Edge, where burial plots are very limited and popular. Edgeland plots require a 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.

On a case-by-case basis, additional burial fees may be required for: weekend burial services, additional staff or volunteer hours, and administrative updates to burial contracts.

4. Making arrangements with other service providers

As Bluestem is not a funeral home, families making arrangements for burial at Bluestem must also independently make arrangements for:

- Purchasing or making a burial container
- Caring for the deceased after death
- Shrouding or casketing the deceased
- Filing 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. Optionally, families may also work with **Officiants, Musicians, Grief Support, Casket Makers, or other providers**.

To help support families in these decisions, Bluestem keeps a list of independent service providers who have previously supported Bluestem families on our website (see [Service Providers](#)). Another excellent resource 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 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 the burial in rain or shine. After the burial, families are welcome to prepare their own reception in the Bluestem barn or stay to wander Bluestem. Once everyone leaves the area, nature resets. For more information, see [For Families](#).

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 on it. Every grave is accounted for in Bluestem's Cemetery records, and families are given GPS coordinates to the burial plot.

Families can 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 (see [Cemetery Standards and Guidelines](#)). 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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