

Buried, Cremated ... or Composted?

New 'green' burial options are allowing more people to choose a final resting place in nature

By MICHELLE W. MARTIN

MARTHA STEWART recently revealed that she'd like a natural burial for herself.

"When one of my horses dies, we dig a giant hole really deep in one of my fields," Stewart said in her interview on the 50+ &

Unfiltered podcast. "The horse is wrapped in a clean white linen sheet and very carefully dropped down into this giant, lovely grave. I want to go there."

Alternative types of body disposal, some with environmental motives, are appealing to a wider array of people. In a 2025 survey by the National Funeral Directors Association, 61.4 percent of respondents were interested in exploring "green" options because of their potential environmental benefits, cost savings or other reasons. That's up from 55.7 percent in 2021. While cost savings aren't the prime motivation for many, green options can cost several thousand dollars less than the average \$8,300 for a traditional service and burial.

For some people, green options might look like a simple burial on private land or being laid to rest in unmanicured lands set aside for conservation. Water cremation is an option that requires less energy than flame-based cremation and uses a mixture containing water and potassium hydroxide, along with heat and sometimes pressure. One of the newer options is to transform the deceased into life-sustaining soil that could

be either placed in a family plot or scattered in the garden.

Cindy Potter's no-fuss, Quaker mom surprised her when she said she'd like to be composted. "I asked her where this was coming from," Potter says. "And she said, 'Well, I just think that cremation causes air pollution, and I don't want to cause air pollution for my final act.'" Fortunately, they were in Seattle, where human composting has been legal since 2019.

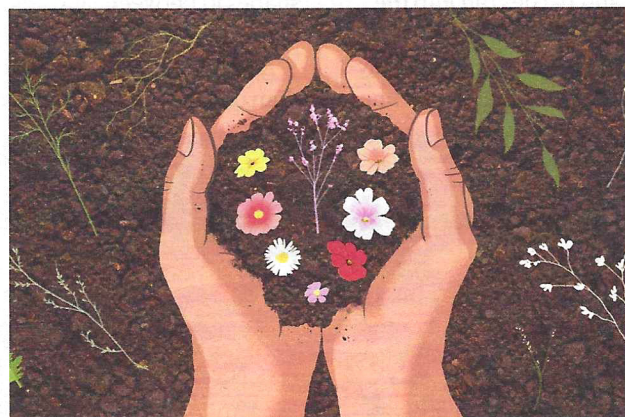
Human composting, or natural organic reduction, takes place within a reusable closed vessel where the body is placed with organic materials, such as alfalfa and up to a few hundred pounds of wood chips. The body's microbes and those in the soil, along with a steady flow of air, allow the body to naturally break down. Partway through the process, inorganic materials are removed, and, similar to the cremation process, bones

are broken down into smaller pieces so they can be more easily transformed. The process, which typically takes between eight and 12 weeks, is legal in 14 states, including Arizona, Nevada, New Jersey and Georgia. Several other states are considering it as well, including Utah, where funeral director Shayneh Starks has seen increasing demand at her Starks Funeral Parlor in Salt Lake City. Last year, she teamed with Se-

attle-based Recompose, the first company to develop natural organic reduction in the United States. Starks helped about 20 families opt for composting.

Return Home, a Washington-based company, transformed Cindy Potter's mom's body, mingling it with the decomposing wood chips, and gave Potter's family the choice to receive as much or as little of the soil as they wished. "We ended up with 10 bags of her," Potter says with a smile. She spread much of the rich soil around the garden at her mother's beach house near Seattle, which she says was her mom's happy place.

Michelle W. Martin is a Seattle-based writer who focuses on health, science and the environment.



FIX YOUR BODY

ALLEVIATING KNEE PAIN

ACHY KNEES are a common complaint as we get older. One major reason: Among people older than 70, about 40 percent have knee osteoarthritis. Strengthening the muscles at the tops of your legs can help. Dr. Jocelyn Wittstein, an associate professor at Duke University School of Medicine and coauthor of *The Complete Bone and Joint Health Plan*, says aching knees often need help from butt muscles and hip muscles to feel better.

Wittstein's three-step plan:



1. Sit-to-stands

Sit near the edge of a sturdy chair, feet hip-width apart. Stand up without using your hands, then slowly sit back down with knees positioned over your toes. Do three sets of 10.



2. Monster walks

Put a resistance band just below your knees. With knees slightly bent, take five steps to the right and five to the left, keeping tension on the

band. Repeat 10 times. If balance is a concern, squat in place.



3. Glute bridges

Lie on your back with knees bent, feet flat. Loop a band just above your knees. Press your knees outward, squeeze your butt and lift your hips without arching your back. Lower slowly. Do three sets of 10.

Stronger hips and glutes can lessen stress on your knees and keep you moving with more confidence. —Barbara Hannah Grufferman, author of *Love Your Age*