NEW ALL-GREEN CEMETERIES IN MARYLAND

- by Chris Palmer

A few conventional cemeteries in Maryland have green burial *sections* that eschew embalming, fancy caskets, and concrete vaults. But, until very recently, Maryland did not have an *all-green* or natural cemetery devoted solely to conservation and green burials. The first such burial ground is Serenity Ridge, a 177-acre plot of land in Windsor Mill near Baltimore.

Green burials are characterized by simplicity: the unembalmed body is wrapped in a shroud or placed in a biodegradable casket, then buried without a vault and allowed to decompose naturally.

Serenity Ridge is the brainchild of Dr. Howard Berg, the landowner and a retired surgeon. He plans to leave the land, currently a mixture of fields, brush, and woods, undeveloped.
He plans to provide families with lists of native trees and shrubs they can plant near gravesites.

Dr. Basil Eldadah is working on Maryland's second green burial ground, Reflection Park, in Silver Spring, a beautiful and wild 40 acres.

Green burials emphasize conservation and humanity's closeness to the Earth and may involve grieving families in death care. These two green cemeteries plan to have shovels for family members who'd like to help dig their loved ones' graves. Both Serenity Ridge and Reflection Park have met the high ecological standards established by the national Green Burial Council that certifies green cemeteries.

Green burial is not new. Before the 19th century and the creation of formal burial grounds, most people were buried this way. Once a loved one died, their body would be washed and taken care of by family and friends, then carried in a simple container and buried on the family property somewhere.

Then, with the Civil War, embalming came along to preserve the bodies of soldiers while they were shipped back home for burial. The funeral industry was launched with expensive caskets, concrete vaults, and large expanses of lawns, all of which utilize significant resources. Embalming uses harmful chemicals like formaldehyde, some of which ends up being flushed into sewers. Cremation, the most common alternative to traditional ground burial, has high energy requirements and releases climate-altering gases and pollution into the air, aggravating lung diseases and climate problems.

Green burial is more environmentally friendly, less expensive than traditional in-ground burial, and fosters a closer connection to nature. These two new green cemeteries are welcome additions to the options open to families in the DC metropolitan and Baltimore areas.