

TRENDING NOW IN LIFESTYLE



LIFESTYLE



Why human composting with 'green burials' is the next big thing

By Gavin Newsham
Published Jan. 21, 2023 | Updated Jan. 21, 2023, 11:13 a.m. ET



Katrina Spade is the founder of Recompose, the world's first human composting enterprise based near Seattle. Families bring loved ones to Recompose where their remains are converted into nutrient-rich compost.
Getty Images for Recompose

MORE ON:
CREMATION

Son of man whose ashes were sent to NYC rocker slams 'outrageous' mistake

NYC indie rocker receives stranger's cremated remains in the mail

Texas mom issues heartbreaking plea for baby's stolen ashes

Woman's plan to bury hubby's ashes at Disney World dashed by airline

Robert Cantisano was the godfather of organic farming in his native California, a man known throughout the state for his pioneering work in the field — and on the fields.

When the man they called "Amigo Bob" lost his long battle with cancer in December 2020, his wife, Jenifer Bliss, was left to fulfill his dying wishes not to be buried or cremated — but to be turned into compost.

As the words written on the side of the recycled cardboard shipping container he used for a casket read: "He loved the earth so much that he wanted to be composted."

Bliss had booked Cantisano in at **Recompose** — the world's first human composting company, near Seattle, Wash. — and now she had to get him there.

Her original intention was to drive her husband there herself, but poor mid-winter weather and the spread of COVID-19 put

that idea to rest. "If you've seen the movie *Little Miss Sunshine* when they drive around with their dead grandpa in the back of the van — I was going to do that," she tells The Post.



TOP CONCERTS



Get seats. Earn rewards. Experience it live.

Queen
23 Shows | Get Tickets

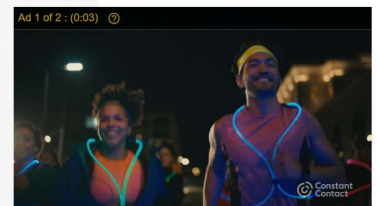
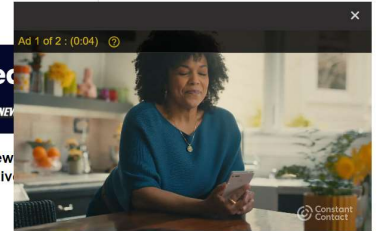
Taylor Swift
71 Shows | Get Tickets

Morgan Wallen
18 Shows | Get Tickets

Aerosmith
37 Shows | Get Tickets

Zach Bryan
70 Shows | Get Tickets

SEE MORE SHOWS



WHAT TO SHOP NOW



There's nothing better right now than these Apple AirPods sales that end ASAP





Jennifer Bliss worked with Recompose to transform the body of her husband — organic farming-pioneer Bob Cantisano — into compost which she used to plant flowers in the gardens of loved ones.

Instead, Bob was picked up and delivered to Recompose, where he became one of the first 10 people in the United States to be composted.

Now, two years on, human composting, or **natural organic reduction (NOR)**, is coming to New York.

On Dec. 31, **Gov. Hochul signed NOR into law**, making New York the sixth state in America to legalize the process, following in the footsteps of Washington, Colorado, Oregon, Vermont and California.

As yet, there are no companies in New York currently offering NOR; but that is likely to change, especially given the success of Recompose.



Cantisano's casket, which was crafted from a recycled shipping container, was painted with words that reflected his commitment to both the earth and composting.

Founded in 2017 by CEO Katrina Spade, Recompose "organically reduced" its first bodies three years later, in December 2020. Today, Recompose has more than 1,200 clients already booked for when they pass away. And while numbers continue to grow, Spade is realistic about just how many people will consider NOR. "We know that human composting won't be for everyone, but for some, turning into soil is very meaningful — gardeners, environmentalists, and people who just don't want to be cremated or buried," she says.

"Recompose is a new option — and we've needed new funeral options for a long time."

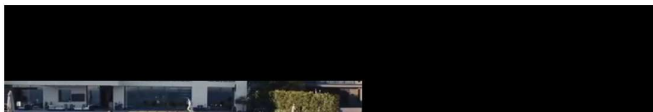
The NOC process is simple.



Gov. Kathy Hochul signed "green burial" into law earlier this year, making New York the sixth state in the nation to approve the process — Hawaii and Maine rejected similar measures. AP

The deceased is placed in a reusable vessel and covered with alfalfa, straw and wood chips, creating an ideal environment for bacteria and microbes to flourish and begin decomposing the body. Roughly 30-60 days later, the remains will be fully transformed into soil while any lingering bone fragments are processed using a cremulator, the same equipment found in conventional cremations.

Typically, a body that's gone through NOR will produce around a cubic yard of nutrient-dense compost. Relatives can take it home or donate it to enrich flower beds or help plant trees across a variety of locations, including Bell's Mountain, a 700-acre Recompose-affiliated land trust in southern Washington.



Amazon reveals official date for Prime deals event in October — early sales to grab

The 11 best women's multivitamins for every life stage, plus medical expert tips on what to look for

This 276-piece first aid kit for your car is over 40% off on Amazon

The best FP Movement styles (and HOKAs to match with each)



FRIDAY SEPTEMBER 29
SHORELINE AMPHITHEATRE

GET TICKETS NOW

LIVE NATION

TRENDING NOW

ON NYPOST.COM



105,224

14-foot alligator caught carrying lifeless human body down a canal



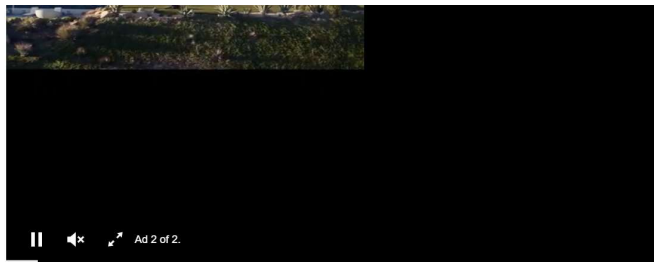
Seniors have stopped eating at Cracker Barrel, Olive Garden — and it's not clear when they'll come back



70,849

14-year-old runaway kills herself in front of deputy trying to convince her to return home





Jenifer Bliss brought all of Amigo Bob home with her, renting a truck from U-Haul and making the long drive from Washington back to California. "We put a big piece of plastic down on the floor of the pickup and then tipped Amigo's compost in using a forklift truck," she says.

On the way back, she stopped at friends' and former clients' houses, planting flowers with Amigo Bob's compost. She also left some under a tree by the Sacramento River, a place her late husband loved.

Then she got home and "now I had this pile of compost in the driveway."

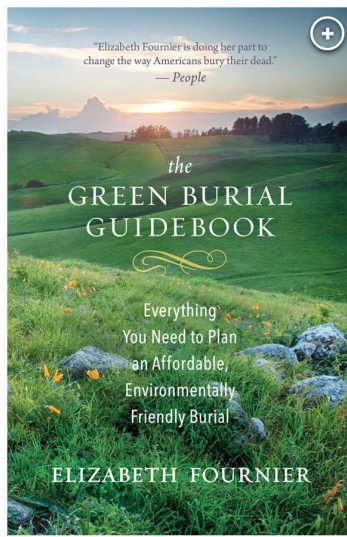


Although newly legal in New York State, "green" burials have the potential to upend the burial industry and reduce the massive amount of environmental waste produced by cremation and traditional interments. dpa/picture alliance via Getty I

Friends would come over to grab a handful of Amigo Bob for their plants and the rest was spread all over their farm and under their favorite tree in the garden. "In that sense, Amigo's body continues to live," says Bliss. "Not as he was, but something new and fresh that is nourishing the soil, the plants and the future."

Such sentiments are precisely why people like New Yorker Bernard O'Brien are keen to embrace composting after they pass. The 65-year-old Brooklyn Heights native had already decided to donate his body to New York Medical College when he dies but now, having researched NOR, he wants to be composted as well. "When you give your body to [research] they typically use it for two years and then they'll cremate the body for free and send the ashes back to the family. But I want them to do this now," he says.

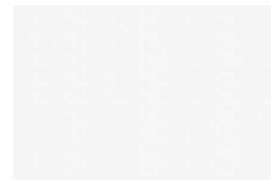
"I just like the idea that the body is returned to the ground. Maybe I could end up on a beautiful nature reserve and I could look up at the bees and the flowers and maybe my loved ones visiting. There's a real appeal to it."



Author Elizabeth Fournier's book has become a bible of sorts for the green burial movement.

While O'Brien, like Gov. Hochul, was brought up a Catholic, his religion is one of the few organizations to reject the idea of NOR — regarding it as an inappropriate manner of dealing with the dead.

In a statement in September 2022, Kathleen Domingo, executive director of the California Catholic Conference, said that human composting "reduces the human body to simply a disposable commodity."



VIDEO

Let'er rip: Neighbor's hilarious fart caught on camera

NOW ON

Page Six



Sharna Burgess announces Brian Austin Green proposed 2 months ago: 'Of course I said yes'

Celeb chef Angie Mar opens latest hotspot Le B as Beatrice Inn homage

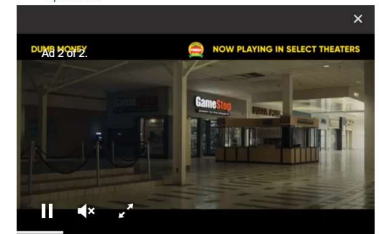
Danny Masterson knew Bijou Phillips would divorce him — but maybe not why

SEE ALL ▶



AdChoices ▶

Sponsored



Their east coast counterparts, at the New York Catholic Conference, were even less restrained. "We believe there are a great many New Yorkers who would be uncomfortable at best with this proposed composting/fertilizing method, which is more appropriate for vegetable trimmings and eggshells than for human bodies."

For Catholics who do favor the idea, Church acceptance may just be a matter of time. After all, it wasn't until 1963 that the Church grudgingly allowed cremation, despite crematoria existing in the United States since 1876.



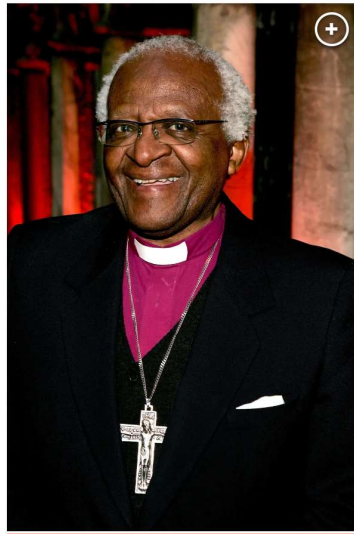
Brooklyn resident Bernard O'Brien has decided to donate his body to research, followed by composting. "I just like the idea that the body is returned to the ground. Maybe I could end up on a beautiful nature reserve," he said.

Andrew Cribb

Along with the Church, some funeral directors — who clearly are concerned about a shift in the burial status quo — have also expressed disdain about human composting. "Whatever the law allows, we would do," a long-time Staten Island funeral director [told the Post last May](#). "Personally, I think it's horrific." Unsurprisingly, human composting bills in [Hawaii and Maine were recently defeated](#).

Funeral director Elizabeth Fournier runs Cornerstone Funeral in Boring, Ore., and is the author of "[The Green Burial Guidebook](#)." Unlike industry holdouts, she believes that any resistance to NOR is centered around outmoded burial customs on one hand — and a funeral industry protecting their own interests on the other. "Flame cremation had a slow start. It was really considered barbaric and not a popular choice. But . . . it is now legal in all 50 States," says the woman nicknamed The Green Reaper.

"Religious and cultural communities that do have an issue with NOR suggest it's a process devoid of reverence to the human body. They feel that grandmother is being thrown on the compost pile or that the human form is now taking on the form of nothing more important than dirt," Fournier continues.



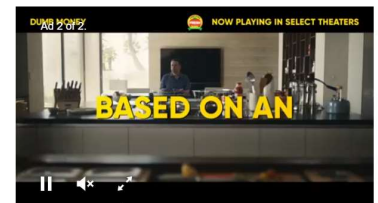
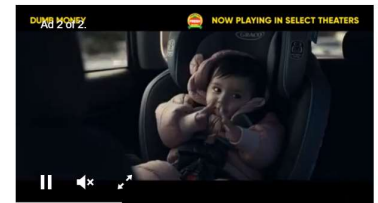
South African Archbishop Desmond Tutu opted for aquamation after he passed away in 2021; the process uses water and potassium hydroxide to liquefy human remains.

Getty Images

At [Order of the Good Death](#), an organization dedicated to promoting more positive and ecological death experiences, the goal is to remove the fear and confusion around human composting, as their founder, mortician and author Caitlin Doughty, explains. "The idea that you will die and your body will have to decompose is scary for most people, so I don't fault anyone for labelling this as a difficult conversation," she says.

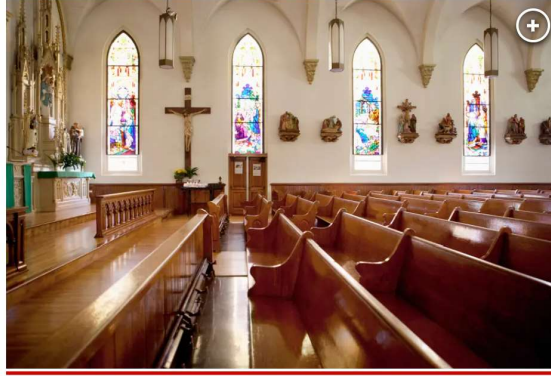
"In spite of that, the response to the idea of human composting has been overwhelmingly positive and we've honestly been completely floored that legislation has already come to six states, given how glacially slow change comes to the funeral industry."

Composting is not the only green alternative to traditional burials or cremations. In early 2022, for example, the [Nobel Peace Prize winner Archbishop Desmond Tutu underwent alkaline hydrolysis](#) (also



called aquamation) after his death in December 2021. Using a mixture of potassium hydroxide and water, aquamation accelerates the liquefaction of the body, with the remaining bones then dried to ash. Aquamation uses roughly 90% less energy than conventional flame-based cremation, but with precisely the same results.

You can also be buried in your own backyard.



The Catholic Church remains opposed to "green burials," which it feels display a lack of respect for human remains.
Getty Images

Currently, there are only three states that prohibit burials on private property – Washington, California and Indiana – while nine (including New York) will allow you to do it, but only with a registered funeral director present.

There are no state laws making caskets mandatory, and so-called "natural burials" are also proving popular. Designed to have a low environmental impact, bodies are typically covered in shrouds or placed in biodegradable caskets and then buried, allowing nature to take its course once underground.

All of this composting and natural burials and aquamation remains fairly unregulated, which is where the aptly-named [Green Burial Council](#) comes in. The nonprofit is charged with overseeing the funeral directors, homes and services that purport to be environmentally friendly — and open to human composting — and assessing whether they live up to those claims.

Along with giving back to the earth, NOR can also be far less costly. According to [Parting](#), the funeral-home comparison site, the average cost of a funeral in the United States is now between \$7,000 and \$10,000, depending on the level of service, cost of the casket and location. In New York, for example, most folks pay toward the upper end of the price range.



Author and mortician Caitlin Doughty runs the Order of the Good Death, an organization that helps to demystify composting and alternative burial options.
Alamy Stock Photo

A natural reduction at [Recompose](#), meanwhile, costs \$7,000 while another Washington-based company, [Return Home](#), offers the service for a mere \$4,950.

Beyond the reduced costs, NOR is also far easier on the environment than traditional burials or cremations. "Human composting saves over a metric ton of carbon per person who chooses it, which is great," says Katrina Spade of [Recompose](#), which will soon open a second site in Denver. "But it's also a fresh new way to look at our mortality. We get to be part of the forest – literally. "You don't get to do that if you're cremated."

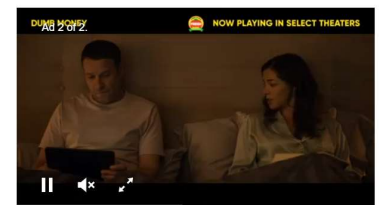
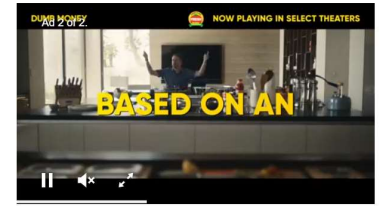
She has a point.

Cremations, which have overtaken burials as the most popular end-of-life option in the United States in the last decade and now represent 57.5% off all dispositions, are hugely energy-intensive, with each typically emitting around 250 pounds of carbon dioxide emissions into the air – or about the same as a 600-mile car trip.

Burials, meanwhile, are arguably worse. Not only are hundreds of thousands of tons of lacquered wood, steel and other metal caskets buried each year but more than 4 million gallons of carcinogenic embalming fluid used on bodies will also go into the ground with them, polluting the soil still further.

Space is also an issue.

On average, nearly 3 million people die each year in the USA, and while the country has a comparatively low population density, the squeeze on space in more populous cities and regions means the supply of land available for interments isn't endless.





What do you think? [Post a comment.](#)

This is why NOR makes complete sense, says Jenifer Bliss. "It is what the earth has been doing with dead plants and animals long before humanity became 'civilized,'" she says.

"Having our bodies composted is a way of giving back, not only to the earth, but also to the future generations, and not just of humans, but of all life."

FILED UNDER CREMATION, DEATH, ENVIRONMENT, FUNERALS, 1/21/23

READ NEXT The strange dark world of the for-profit blood industry

SPONSORED STORIES



The economics of thinness
The Economist



[Photos] 27+ Disgusting Facts About Life In The Wild West
Show Snob



[Photos] Vintage Ads So Appalling They Would Likely Be Banned Now
12Up



I removed my nose and nipples — now I'm harassed in the streets



Extremely revealing 'Vagina G-string' bikini explodes at Miami Swim...



I'm an AI influencer: Followers crave my sexy snaps — but I don't exist



Why China's economy won't be fixed
The Economist



California Program Will Cover the Cost to Install Solar if You Li...
CA Clean Energy



Historic Figures Who Actually Lived Long Enough To Be...
Livestly

