

Preparing and Shrouding a Body for Green Burial

There are many ways to manage this. Some steps we took are optional.

Timing and Decision-Making Considerations

- Cemetery legalities (MO statues on Private Cemeteries 214.090, -.120, -.103, -.131, -.132 and 214.140-.208)
- Grave location – environmental concerns
- When/how to dig the grave – by hand over time or back-hoe? If back-hoe, whose? Cover any hole-in-waiting with something so it won't cave in from rain.
- Identify enough physically able people to move the body (onto the shroud board, onto the grave boards, into the grave)
- Who to pronounce the person dead, legally? Get set up with hospice?
- Materials collection (see list) – tools, too.
- Decide what room and on what surface you will wrap the body in its shroud. Consider doorways and rigor mortis (sets in 2-4 hours after death). In some ways a shrouded body is easier to move – in other ways a lightly dressed body might be easier, if limp. See **Arrange the Body on the Board and Shroud** (below) for other considerations.
- Clothing the body (optional) is also impacted by a rigor mortis). Cutting the clothes all the way up the back makes dressing easier. You can slit the back of the sleeves and pant legs, too, and pin them around those extremities.

Materials (We had all of this on hand.)

- A board to support the body within the shroud – a couple inches longer than the person's height. Keep it as light-weight as possible for the weight of the person. We used 5/8" plywood for a 110 pound person.
- Supplies to lower the body into the grave: three or four 8' 2X6s (or 2X8s for heavy person) and two or three strong 40' pieces of rope.
- Two pieces of cloth 2-3 feet longer than the person's height. One needs 24-36" wide depending on the width of the board. The other needs be to be 40-60" wide depending on the girth of the person. I used a set of sheets -- queen-size – which were generous for Linda's size. I used the 'bottom sheet' to wrap the support board and the 'top sheet' to wrap the board and the body. With a really tall person, you might need to use the top/outer sheet on the diagonal to get the length you need. You could skip the cloth on the inner board. And you could also use two pieces of cloth for the outer (board and body) cloth -- again, no rules.
- Clothes for the body, if you wish. Also jewelry, memorabilia, notes, crystals, essential oils, flower petals, etc. And a scarf or tie or whatever to drape around the shroud – all optional.
- Scissors, pins, dental floss and a large needle to sew the shroud shut – its slickness helps it stitch easily and its strength holds well.



Our Timeline -- with some instruction (*some personal choices in italics*)

Our Timing	The Body	The Shroud	The Grave Site
2 years before death			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Choose a cemetery site and communicate with the county (and, in our case, ORLT) to clear permissions.
3 weeks before Linda died			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Choose a grave site. Check in with a back-hoe operator and describe the situation to him.
Right after death (for us, in the evening)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Call hospice or doctor to pronounce death. <p>Tidy & Arrange the Body After Death</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Remove all clothing (OK to cut off) Wipe and wash the body (including face) and put a clean pad or towel under the hips. Close the eyes and secure with a light weight (coins, eye pillow -- or tape -- removed later). Optional. Tie the jaw closed with a tie or sash. Optional. Snug the arms to the body and fold the hands across heart (or waist). Align the legs and feet. Cover with a light sheet. 	<p>There are many comprehensive descriptions on preparing a body after death.</p> <p>https://reformjudaism.org/preparing-jewish-funeral-guide</p> <p><i>Caring for Our Own -- Preparing the Body for a Home Funeral</i>, 2 pages, offered by Crossings. I can make you a copy of this, but can't find a link. Ask if interested.</p>	
The next morning		<p>Prepare the Shroud Board and Collect Supplies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cut 5/8"-thick section of plywood to body width and height, plus 1". Trim to this shape.  Collect rope and 2X6s (see materials list) Put everything in the truck Drive to house and back up to the exit door 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Call the back-hoe guy and find out when he can come. Ask him to stay to fill in the grave, too.

Our Timing	The Body	The Shroud	The Grave Site
The next morning (continued)		<p>Wrap the Shroud Board</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Center the board on a large, folded, bottom sheet (wrong side facing up) ▪ Fold and smooth the loose fabric onto the top of the board ▪ Trim off the bulk/excess fabric and then staple-gun snugly in place. 	<p style="text-align: center;">More on Shrouds, Shroud Design & Decoration, and Shroud Burials</p> <p style="text-align: center;"> https://www.pinterest.com/pin/523473156667354001/ (shroud designs) https://www.usurnsonline.com/burial/ways-to-personalize-a-burial-shroud/ https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/the-shroud/ </p>
	<p>Arrange the Body on the Board and Shroud <i>Because Linda died in a hospital bed in the living room and the pick-up could pull up to that door, we did this on her hospital bed. These steps were familiar because they are used routinely in changing sheets and washing a person who is unable to leave their bed.</i> If you are moving the body to a second surface (table, the bed of the truck) to arrange it in the shroud, you can significantly simplify the steps below. In that case, get the outer sheet and then the shroud-board centered on the second surface. Then bring the body over and set it on top – and jump down to the last two bullet points.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Check the body and wash again, if needed. Move the body to one side of the bed or table. ▪ Open the top sheet and fold it once in half length-wise. If there's a prettier side have it on the outside. ▪ With the fold close to the length of the body, smooth the folded top sheet on the unoccupied half of the bed. The sheet should extend evenly beyond the person's head and feet. Some of the sheet will hang over the side of the bed. ▪ Fold or bunch up the top half of the sheet so it rests along the fold. Keep this long wad of cloth as close to the body as possible. ▪ Place the wrapped shroud support board on the smoothed half of the top sheet as close to the center of the bed as possible. Keep the folded/bunched up part of the top sheet between the body and the board. ▪ Lift the body onto the board. ▪ Smooth out the bunched/folded half of the top sheet on the now-vacated half of the bed. ▪ Adjust all three parts (top sheet, board and body) so they are centered with each other. ▪ Anoint the body with favorite scents, essential oils or herbs. <p><i>[We put some of Linda's special things (jewelry, notes, photos, small carvings, crystals) in a cloth bag under her hands. I put two favorite necklaces around her neck and we sprinkled her with flower petals.]</i></p>		

Our Timing	The Body	The Shroud	The Grave Site
The next morning (continued)	<p>Close the Shroud</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Pull the sides of the top sheet over the top of the body all along its length. Check to make sure you have enough width everywhere – adjust the placement of the board on the top sheet as necessary. ▪ Starting at the feet, fold the cloth up from the bottom and then over from the sides at an angle. Use pins to hold it in place and continue folding and pinning up to the thighs keeping the fabric wrapped fairly tightly. Tuck the fabric bulk in smoothly. It’s okay to trim away some of the bulk if you prefer, but keep at least 2” of folded-over cloth edges so the stitches don’t pull loose from the weight of the body and the tightness of the shroud. ▪ Starting at the feet, sew the pinned portions with double-threaded dental floss. ▪ As you move up the body and closer to the top pins, pause your sewing to continue to fold and pin. Then go back to sewing, moving up the torso. ▪ Before sewing above the heart, start pinning down from the top of the head, smoothing and tucking the folds to meet at the heart. Continue sewing until it’s closed. <i>We left the cloth open from the heart up, folded loosely around her face for ‘viewing’ until after lunch.</i> 		
	<p><i>Friends started gathering and we shared brief lunch and stories in the same room. I took a nap while others sat with Linda, walked the labyrinth or started gathering cedar.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Finish stitching the shroud closed, if not done earlier. ▪ Wrap a scarf or tie (optional) around the ‘neck’ or waist and stitch it in a few places so it doesn’t shift. <i>I chose Linda’s ordination stole.</i> ▪ Load the shrouded body on the back of the truck and drive to grave site. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Cut soft cedar branches and sprigs -- and perennial herbs. ▪ Line the bottom and lowest part of the sides of the grave with the larger cedar branches. ▪ The back-hoe arrives and the grave is dug, along with a second hole for a tree.
After Lunch	<p>Burial</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Set the three 2X6s across the grave. Drape the two ropes across the grave between the 2X6s. ▪ Set the shrouded body on the 2X6s. ▪ The four strongest people hold the ropes and lift the shrouded body while others pull out the 2X6s. ▪ Use the ropes to quickly lower the shrouded body into the grave. Pull each rope out from one end. ▪ Say a few words, read a poem or sing a song. <i>For us, this was simply a burial (not a funeral), so it was pretty spontaneous and brief. Linda’s memorial was four months later.</i> ▪ Scatter flower petals and then soft cedar springs into the grave. <i>At this point our group broke up. Some stayed to oversee these last steps; others went for a walk or to the house to reorganize the leftovers and dessert.</i> ▪ The back-hoe operator fills in the grave. Pay or offer an honorarium. Scatter wildflower or other seeds, rake, water, mulch lightly. 		