

Earth Friendly Coffins & Caskets: Build Your Own

Making your own burial container, or making one for a family member can be a very meaningful and rewarding experience. To meet 'Green Burial Standards,' avoid anything that is toxic and not biodegradable.

Acceptable Materials

- **Wood:** Wood should be locally sourced. Pine and Poplar are softer woods and will likely biodegrade much more quickly than oak, maple, or walnut.
- **Screws:** Use of screws and nails to hold your burial container is permitted, however, metal accessories for aesthetics are not. **Galvanized or other weather-resistant types are not permitted.** The intention here is to reduce the amount of heavy metals and their eventual resulting compounds from occupying the soil.
- **Dowels:** An alternative to metal screws and nails is to use dowels to hold your casket or coffin together.
- **Paints/Stains:** Non-toxic paint (natural or earth paint) is preferred. Avoid high-VOC paints. There are a number of natural materials that can be used to stain wood (ex: coffee or black tea).

Materials To Avoid

- **Wood:** No pressure treated wood or exotic/imported woods.
- **Metal:** The use of metal is to be kept at a minimum and is only allowed for nails and screws (galvanized or other weather-resistant types are not permitted). No metal handles/accessories, or metal decoramental pieces.
- **Glue/Adhesives:** We strongly recommend against using any glues or other adhesives; these compounds are usually not very biodegradable, often toxic in concentration, and are functionally unnecessary.
- **Finishes/Varnishes:** the use of water seals, weather-proof (outdoor) paints, varnishes, or other water-proof finishes is prohibited.

Dimensions

A standard coffin is 6 feet long, 23 inches wide, and 15 inches deep. Adjust as needed.

There is no "one size fits all" rule when it comes to burial containers. However, it is important to stay within "normal" dimensions to ensure a successful burial process. Decrease dimensions as needed, and increase the dimensions only as needed to accommodate the size of the person.

Be sure to communicate to us the final dimensions so we can dig an appropriate sized hole.



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Handles

Don't forget handles! You'll want handles for many reasons, not the least of which is ease of transporting your burial container to the grave site. We also use handles for feeding straps through to lower the coffin or casket into the grave. Make sure that your design can accommodate 6 people carrying the container (three on each side), and that any handles or holds are sturdy enough to support that weight. On average, a pine coffin or casket will weigh 60 to 80 lbs, plus the weight of you (or the occupant) and any articles of clothing.

Decorating

Decorating a coffin or casket can be a moving experience for friends and family. Feel free to use your imagination and have fun. Painting, carving, wood ironing, hand written notes, and decoupage ([using a paste made from flour/water](#)) are all options. Please avoid high-VOC paints. Tung oil can give a natural finished look without retarding the decomposition process of the container once it is buried. The look of raw, sanded wood is also very attractive!

Liners

Casket and coffin liners should be made of natural fibers (no synthetic or synthetic blend fabrics or fills). Liners are not required, however, if you or the occupant of the box would like some bodily comfort, it is fine to use, for example, wool, cotton, silk, or bamboo fabric bedding, pillow or wrappings. Other materials may be permissible, so just ask before you get set on a particular idea!

DIY Plans

Checkout [this blog](#) and scroll down to "Wood Caskets" for links to different online DIY Plans.

