



Willow Pond ©Richard Cheek

Understanding Cremation

Mount Auburn has performed over 62,000 cremations since 1900. Our crematory adjoins historic Bigelow Chapel and provides a peaceful and attractive setting where family members can choose to receive mourners and be present at the start of the cremation if they wish. All cremations at Mount Auburn are carried out in accordance with the highest standards and with dignity and care. Here are some of the questions that many people ask and our answers.





What is cremation?

Cremation is the process by which human remains are reduced to bone fragments – **not ashes** – by heat and evaporation. The container holding the body is placed in a specially designed combustion chamber called a retort where the cremation occurs. At the end of the cremation, the bone fragments are taken out of the retort and reduced to a uniform size by mechanical means, any recognizable metal from any prostheses or the container having been removed. Depending upon the size of the body, there are approximately six to nine pounds of bone fragments left after the cremation. Each cremation is done individually and carefully to ensure correct identification. Throughout the process, the remains are handled with dignity and respect. Cremation is a simple, clean, affordable and dignified process that is increasingly gaining in popularity. Approximately 31% of those who died in Massachusetts in 2006 were cremated.

Are funeral arrangements different when cremation is chosen?

Not necessarily. The same options available to those choosing casket burial are open to those choosing cremation. A wake and funeral with the body present in a casket may be held prior to cremation, or a memorial service without the body may be held either before or after cremation. Either service may be as simple or formal as desired. A practical benefit of cremation is that it gives you the opportunity to plan a memorial service and burial for the most convenient time, which can be some time after a death. Cremation also gives you the option of dividing the remains for scattering and/or burial in more than one location. No matter what your beliefs and wishes, Mount Auburn will do our best to carry them out. In all cases cremation offers you the opportunity to put your loved one to rest with care, dignity and respect.

May the cremation be witnessed?

Yes. Arrangements may be made ahead of time to have a limited number of people present when the container with the body is placed in the cremation chamber (or retort) and the cremation is initiated. Cremation takes about three hours. Some people prefer to stay in the chapel next door or walk in the grounds during the cremation.

Do all religions approve of cremation?

Many religions approve of cremation and view it as an individual choice. Mount Auburn does all we can to accommodate the customs of all religions related to cremation.

Is a funeral director required?

No. Those wishing to care for their own dead may do so. Written guidelines issued by the Massachusetts Department of Public Health and Mount Auburn are available at the Cemetery Office. Most people, however, prefer to engage the services of a licensed professional to transport the remains from the place of death to Mount Auburn and complete all the documents required for cremation. Mount Auburn is not able to provide this transportation service. A funeral director is able to remove any pacemaker or other similar medical implant which is required to be removed prior to the body being brought to the crematory as these may explode during cremation. Any personal effects must also be removed, as they will be destroyed during cremation.

Is embalming or other preparation required?

No. But if there is to be a funeral service with a public visiting period (a wake) prior to cremation, embalming is often desirable for aesthetic and sanitary reasons. Also, if the body is to be transported by common carrier across state or national borders before cremation, embalming may be required, depending upon local laws.



Ceramic urn

Is a casket required?

No. Crematories do require that the body be enclosed in a rigid container made of combustible material, but there are many options ranging from the simplest to the most elaborate. At Mount Auburn the body is cremated in the same container in which it arrives, and the staff does not open the container except as required by the medical examiner. We do, however, remove handles and other non-combustible parts of the container.

Is cremation carried out right after death?

Massachusetts law requires a 48-hour waiting period after death before a cremation can be performed, except when otherwise approved by the medical examiner in cases of infectious disease. Once all the necessary paperwork has been received by the Cemetery, the cremation takes place as soon as scheduling permits.

What certificates or other paperwork are required?

A death certificate is required, issued by the attending or other certified physician. A copy must be filed with the city or town in which the death occurs in order to obtain a burial permit, which authorizes transportation of the body. The burial permit must be filed with Mount Auburn prior to cremation. The medical examiner's certificate must also be filed with the Cemetery prior to cremation. A funeral director usually works with the Mount Auburn staff to ensure that all the necessary documents are obtained. A cremation order authorizing the cremation must be signed by the person having legal custody of the remains, which is usually the surviving spouse or children, or a sibling, or the parent(s) of a child.

What happens to the cremated remains after cremation?

Cremation is not the end of the process. At Mount Auburn the cremated remains are placed in a cardboard box acceptable for burial and are returned to the person signing the cremation authorization or to the funeral director. We strongly encourage families to arrange for the placement of cremated remains in a permanent site, such as a cemetery. Often people choose to scatter cremated remains but discover later that they would have preferred a burial site to which they could return and which future generations could visit. At Mount Auburn we offer many options, including burial in the ground or placement in an indoor niche or outdoor crypt. We also offer a variety of containers (urns) and families can also choose to pour the cremated remains directly into the earth. And some decide to scatter some of the remains and put the rest in Mount Auburn with a permanent memorial.



What is an urn?

An urn is a container for cremated remains. Various types of urns are available. Some are simple, others elaborate. They can be made of bronze, marble, wood, granite, ceramic or plastic. Mount Auburn has a wide selection in several price ranges. Some families use a treasured heirloom of an appropriate size for containing cremated remains.

Can the urn be buried in a family lot?

Yes. At Mount Auburn lots and graves which may no longer have room for casket burials may accommodate urn burials with the consent of the owner. If a memorial at the burial place is desired, however, be sure to ask what restrictions there may be.

What kinds of memorials are available for cremated remains?

The choice of cremation does not itself restrict the type of memorial. Rather, it is the type of interment space that may dictate your options. Otherwise, the memorial may be as personal as you wish and can afford. As described in the Memorials section below, Mount Auburn offers many choices. A memorial is personalized tribute to a person's life; it becomes a focal point for remembrance and provides future generations with evidence of a life lived.

Can arrangements for cremation be made prior to need?

Yes. Planning ahead is always advisable. We suggest that you make your wishes known to your family and your lawyer. By making them clear, you will ease the burden placed on others at the time of your death. Mount Auburn has a legally binding Declaration of Intent form in which you may state your desire to be cremated, name the person you wish to arrange your cremation, and describe what should happen to the cremated remains. This form should be kept with your papers and your family or friends made aware of its terms. If it is kept with your will in a safe deposit box it may not be available when needed immediately after your death.



Bronze urn