

The Scattering Garden: Providing a Place of Beauty and Resonance

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1 • Tundra scattering ring, Iqaluit Municipal Cemetery, Nunavut, Canada. Photo: LEES+Associates

More North Americans than ever are scattering their loved ones' ashes. Every year, thousands of cremated remains are scattered across the landscapes of North America. It is estimated that at least two tons of cremated remains are scattered on Vancouver's North Shore Mountains every year. This trend reflects both the rising rates of cremation, and a desire to find ritual and connection when dealing with grief.

As the role of cremation has increased, so has the demand for scattering gardens in cemeteries. Reasons for growing interest in scattering within the cemetery landscape vary. Having scattered their loved one's ashes at sea, on a mountain top, or surreptitiously at a favorite park or holiday destination, some families later regret not having a specific marker or a place to easily return to visit. Others may be drawn by the desire to find a sacred space for commemoration, or a decision to be interred next to loved ones. By re-creating the experience of interment and memorialization in a more natural landscape, scattering gardens can draw people to the cemetery for the scattering experience.

Providing a place of beauty and resonance for this type of interment can address a family's desire for a natural setting; one that evokes the idea of regeneration, and connection to a meaningful landscape.

As the industry responds to the needs of families in the 21st century, cemeteries are developing a range of approaches to scattering gardens, unique to their landscapes and climates, and the cultural and spiritual needs of the families they serve.

Integrating a scattering garden into an existing cemetery necessitates several important considerations. As a starting

point, consider the existing landscape including opportunities on the site to incorporate an existing "natural" area, or restore a naturalized area that will be visually evocative of a characteristic landscape.

A scattering garden is an opportunity to make use of an underutilized part of the cemetery, such as an area with steeper slopes, a woodland, or an area with ground conditions otherwise unsuitable for traditional in-ground burial.

Scattering gardens can be designed for small areas as well as extensive areas of a cemetery. Almost all cemeteries can accommodate some form of scattering opportunity for families. The type of scattering garden and area selected will vary greatly depending on the space available, the climate, the nature of the land, and the management, administration, operation, and associated maintenance. Whether a grassland, forest, or savanna setting, scattering areas can be adapted to reflect the natural landscape of the area.

Scattering should ideally be offered as part of a range of cremation options, such as cremation walks, nature trails, family vessels, ossuaries, in-ground cremation plots, and family and community columbaria. This provides a range of price points, as

well as an opportunity for family members to access individual interment preferences within the cemetery.

Key design principles to guide site selection and design of a scattering garden include:

1. Identify opportunities in areas of the cemetery suitable for scattering gardens,
2. Plan for the scattering area to be integrated within the overall cemetery's mix of interment options, and
3. Create a design that works with and enhances the existing landscape character of the cemetery and views out to "borrowed" landscapes beyond the cemetery.

The following projects offer examples of how these design principles were successfully applied to create scattering options in very different climates and geographic locations.

- Dilworth Mountain Scattering Trail at Kelowna Memorial Park Cemetery, British Columbia (*photo 2, right*)
- Tundra scattering ring, Iqaluit Municipal Cemetery, Nunavut, Canada (*photo 1, opposite page*)
- Outdoor celebration room, Shuswap Cemetery, City of Salmon Arm, British Columbia, Canada (*photo 3, right*)

Innovations in Scattering Garden Design

Family vessels are a relatively new feature in North American cemeteries. Made of granite, these beautiful objects have been designed specifically for the interment of cremated remains. (*photo 4, right*)

At Shuswap Memorial Cemetery, in Salmon Arm, British Columbia, LEES+Associates designed a scattering garden featuring family vessels and a memorial wall integrated as part of an outdoor celebration room (gathering space). Interment rights are purchased so that only close family members are interred in a family vessel. The same type of vessel can also be used as an ossuary for the interment of co-mingled cremated remains of members of the community. (*photo 5, p. 8*)

Hybrid Scattering Gardens

Cremated remains are typically salty and alkaline. Therefore, if a scattering area is relatively small, managing the amount of material placed in a scattering garden becomes increasingly important in order to maintain good soil health for the plants.

Using family vessels and ossuaries is an increasingly common way for cemeteries to manage the volume of cremated remains being placed within scattering areas. These "hybrid" scattering gardens are becoming more popular with both families and cemeteries. Lakeview Cemetery in Penticton, British Columbia, is a good example of a hybrid scattering garden where a proportion of ash is scattered, and the remainder is placed in the ossuary. (*photo 6, p. 8*)

Some families prefer to inter all of the cremated remains of a family member in one place, be it in an ossuary or in a scattering garden. This may be personal preference, but it may also be due to religious traditions. Most cemeteries understand this and try to be as flexible as possible to accommodate the needs of a family.

Family vessels and ossuaries can be placed in pairs to provide an architectural presence to frame an entrance into a scattering

garden, or any other part of the cemetery as part of a mix of interment options. (*photo 7, p. 8*)

Memorialization

A key element of any scattering garden is memorialization. At Kelowna Memorial Park Cemetery, plaques are attached to basalt columns at the lookout point on the "Nature Walk" scattering trail. At Shuswap Cemetery, a memorial wall frames the scattering garden and provides an opportunity to purchase

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2 • Dilworth Mountain Scattering Trail at Kelowna Memorial Park Cemetery, British Columbia. Photo: LEES+Associates



3 • Outdoor Celebration Room, Shuswap Cemetery, City of Salmon Arm, British Columbia, Canada. Photo: LEES+Associates



4 • Ossuary at Shuswap Memorial Cemetery, Salmon Arm, British Columbia. Photo: LEES+Associates



5 • Memorial Wall, Shuswap Memorial Cemetery, Salmon Arm, British Columbia. Photo: LEES+Associates



6 • Hybrid scattering garden at Lakeview Cemetery, Penticton, British Columbia. Photo: LEES+Associates



7 • Family vessels at Kelowna Memorial Park Cemetery, British Columbia. Photo: City of Kelowna



8 • Basalt columns memorial wall, Dilworth Mountain Scattering Trail, Kelowna Memorial Park Cemetery, British Columbia. Photo: LEES+Associates

a memorial plaque. At Okotoks Cemetery, sculptural weathering steel memorial walls mimic the Okotoks “big rock,” a prominent local geological landmark of great spiritual significance.

Memorialization, however, is not mandatory. The provision of benches near a scattering area is also very important to families when they are considering where to scatter a family member.

(photo 8 and 9, left and below)

Scattering into Water

There is an increasing need and opportunity for cemeteries across North America to better serve Sikh and Hindu families with options that allow scattering into moving water.

Nature Walks

Some cemeteries have capitalized on the opportunity to use the existing landscape character of their properties to create scattering “Nature Walks.” This is an emerging cremation garden typology, often characterized by a more natural landscape setting, and blended with a range of other cremation interment options as a method of appealing to families who want to be interred in proximity to one another but who have different interment preferences.

Accurately Marking the Scattering Location

For most cemeteries it is not a legal requirement to record the location where the scattering of a family member has taken place. However, it is possible for cemeteries to offer this service now that cemetery records can be integrated with Geographic Information Systems (GIS) maps. It is a useful feature in larger natural scattering areas that do not have easily identifiable landscape features. Using a proprietary cemetery app such as iCemetery on a smartphone means that families can follow the pin on the screen directly to the location. This is important to some families but not to others.

Special Considerations or Challenges

Each model or type of scattering garden brings with it certain management, administration, operational, and maintenance requirements. For example:

- In an intensively used scattering garden, maintaining good growing conditions for the plants and maintaining the plants in good condition is a priority;
- If scattering takes place by family member on a natural grassland or meadow, then the cemetery operations team




9 • Scattering garden with weathering steel memorial walls, Okotoks Cemetery, Alberta. Photo: Sunset Memorial & Stone

may need to gently tidy the area after the family has returned home;

- If an ossuary is used as part of a hybrid scattering garden, a method needs to be developed in tandem with the local funeral directors on how to place the cremated remains into the ossuary with dignity during a service, assuming family members will be present, and possibly participating.

The management, operation, and care of any scattering garden offering should be defined in the cemetery's standard operating procedures. These should be updated regularly as part of the continual refinement to provide the best possible experience for families during the interment, and when coming back to visit.

Conclusion

As industry professionals we feel there is a compelling case for cemeteries to consider providing cremation scattering gardens. Provision of a scattering garden as a part of a range of cremation interment options can position a cemetery to address the emerging spiritual and cultural needs of families in the 21st century, and attract families looking for a more flexible interment option. Scattering gardens bring families back to the cemetery by providing a permanent, meaningful, and accessible place to remember loved ones. 

LEES+Associates is a landscape architecture and planning firm actively involved in the planning and management of cemeteries across North America. With over 70 years of combined cemetery research, management, planning, and design experience on our team, we offer a full range of cemetery consulting, mapping, bylaw preparation, computerized cemetery management, and business case analysis.



Richard Cook has over 20 years of experience in landscape architecture and has worked as a Senior Associate with LEES+Associates since 2012. As a rigorous and sensitive designer, Richard has led or been a critical part of numerous cemetery projects, from master plans and cemetery concepts through to detailed design and construction.



Heidi Redman is a Senior Associate at LEES+Associates with a strong background in cemetery planning having led or co-led numerous cemetery projects while with the firm. Heidi brings experience working closely with clients to develop cemetery designs that are responsive to community needs while respecting local, natural site conditions.

It was great seeing everybody in Las Vegas at the Cremation Symposium!

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