

Pet Bereavement

What you need to know
about burying a pet at home



When the time comes,
CPC CARES . . .

Introduction

As a pet owner, you probably share a deep emotional and social bond with your pet. The loss of a companion animal can produce strong feelings that are equivalent to the grief felt from losing a human companion. It may be particularly difficult if you took the brave decision to have your pet put to sleep. Such a decision shows the enormous amount of love and respect you had for your pet and your ability to put your pet's care and well-being before your own thoughts of loss. It may be comforting to know that euthanasia means 'easy death' in Greek.

After euthanasia you will need to decide what happens to your pet's remains. Although most people choose to have their pet cremated, it is not against the law to bury your pet at home.

This leaflet sets out all you need to know about the burial of pet animals, including the legalities, and outlines the practicalities that you need to consider.

What the Law Says

Under Article 24(1) (a), Regulation 28 of the Animal By-Product Regulations 2011, pet animals may be buried. The definition of a pet animal given within these regulations considers that most people own domestic animals such as cats, dogs, and rabbits.

This means that other animals – such as sheep, cattle, pigs, goats and poultry etc – are considered 'normal' farm species. They cannot be buried therefore and would need to be disposed of by another legally approved route such as cremation. For information and advice on cremation, please telephone CPC on 01763 207700.

Horse owners should contact their local authority for guidance, as the disposal of equines is covered by EU regulation.



Guidelines

If you have decided to bury your pet at home, there are some important guidelines you can follow to ensure you are complying with the law – designed to protect the environment, as well as to deter wild animals from uncovering the burial site:

- Burial must only take place on land that you own. If you rent a property please be aware that most tenancy agreements do not allow the burial of animals in the garden.
- Bury your pet as soon as possible, ideally within a few hours after death. It is best not to bury your pet in a plastic container or bag as this hinders the process of degeneration. Your veterinary practice will be able to provide you with a cardboard pet coffin, where available. Alternatively you may wish to bury your pet wrapped in a favourite blanket or with a favourite toy.
- Ensure there is at least a metre of soil between the top of the casket or your pet's body and the ground; this prevents other animals digging up the grave. When backfilling, compact and level the ground at intervals of about 30cm to prevent settlement. Avoid burying a pet in a flowerbed that is likely to be re-dug and re-planted; planting a small tree or shrub on the site would provide protection and a lasting memorial.
- Once buried, by law you are not allowed to exhume your pet.
- The Environment Agency recommends that graves should be more than 250 metres from any well or borehole; ten metres from ponds or streams; and 1.5 metres from underground pipes and cables. Animals buried in fields should be 250 metres from any human-consumption water supply; 30 metres from any other spring; and ten metres from any field drain.
- Generally the Environment Agency expresses little interest in home pet burials, although the government department could technically reclassify a garden used for pet burial as a pet cemetery.

Contacts

Before burying your pet at home, CPC recommends that you contact your local authority, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA), and the Environment Agency for the most up-to-date advice.

Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA)

t: 0845 933 5577
w: www.defra.gov.uk
e: helpline@defra.gsi.gov.uk

Environment Agency

t: 0870 850 6506
w: www.environment-agency.gov.uk

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