

To Cremate or Not to Cremate ...

...These Are Your Options

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The death of a beloved equine partner is a topic that none of us really wants to think about. We often believe that we won't have to deal with this issue until our horses are very old, but a sudden illness or accident, and inevitably we are faced with a tragic loss.

What will you do when your horse dies?

The better prepared you are, the easier it will be for everyone. Know that you have options available to you when the time comes to remove and dispose of your horse's body. You will be faced with choosing burial, a rendering service, or cremation. Only **you** can decide which option is right for you and your situation.

Ideally, most of us would prefer to bury our horse friend under his favorite shade tree in the corner of the north forty. However, burial may not be a reality for many due to limited space or the fact that you board your horse at a stable. There may be limited or no pet cemeteries in your area or local burial laws may prohibit livestock burial. Getting your horse to the burial site may also pose a problem.

Unless you own a backhoe, you will need to hire a contractor to dig a grave. Backhoe contractors vary in price from \$250 up to \$500, depending on your location. Burial is permanent. If you ever move, your horse stays buried with the property.

You will need to ensure that you are following local and state laws pertaining to proper livestock burial. You must take into consideration buried utilities, water and sewer lines, and ground water contamination. The Iowa Department of Natural Resources has strict rules concerning burial.

Another option may be a rendering service. The service will arrive and winch the body of your horse onto a truck with numerous other dead animals. Some rendering services have quit picking up horses, so this service may not even be available in your area. These services can be found in the yellow pages of your phone book. Rendering may cost up to \$250.

As one who has experienced the disgrace of having to utilize a rendering service to pick up a dead baby foal while living in Colorado, this was the most horrible experience I have ever gone through. At the time, this was my only option. Hopefully, this would be your last resort for disposal.

Cremation is a respectful way to memorialize your faithful horse companion. Cremation involves an incinerator that reaches very high temperatures (1400-2100 degrees F). The cremation of a horse takes approximately 12-16 hours depending on the size of the animal. After cremation, the bones of the horse remain in the incinerator. The bones are then processed to produce the ashes or cremains that are returned to you.

Before selecting a cremation service, you should get a few answers to your questions.

When cremating your horse, you may have the option of receiving all, or only a part of, your horse's ashes/cremains. Alternatively, you may choose to receive none of the ashes/cremains. This is your decision.

You will want to verify with the service that you are getting a private or single cremation and that you will be receiving only your horse's cremains. (Some services will commingle animals together and you will be receiving the cremains of not only your horse but also any other animal or pet that was cremated with your horse.)

When contacting a cremation service, ask how big their

incinerator is and can they handle the entire body of your horse, or will they need to dismember your horse so that it will fit into the incinerator.

Ask the service you contact if they will pick up your deceased horse. If they will pick up your horse, what kind of equipment will you need to have available for them. Will your horse be transported covered or in an enclosed vehicle or trailer? What method do they use to load the body? Remember, we are talking about a 900-1500 pound large animal. Tractors, loaders, winches, straps, and trailers are needed to handle and transport these large heavy dead animals. Most services do everything in their power to kindly, respectfully, and humanely handle your horse's body.

If the cremation service will not pick up your deceased horse, how will you transport the body to the cremation facility? Will the cremation service allow you to haul your horse to their location to be euthanized by a vet at their facility? If you are considering euthanizing your horse, plan ahead and contact the cremation service. They will more than likely have instructions for you on preparing your horse's deceased body for easier pick up and transport and easier cremation.

Please let the cremation service know if your horse was diseased or contagious so that they can take appropriate precautions not to spread disease to their facility or next pick up location.

At Ashes to Ashes Pet Cremation Service, we offer to groom and collect your deceased horse's tail, and if your horse was shod at the time of cremation, we will return the horseshoes along with the cremains. We will also allow you to witness your horse's cremation.

The cost to cremate your horse varies from facility to facility, ranging from approximately \$300 to \$1500. Mileage can add to the cost, as can specialized urns.

Cremation is a forever memory. Unlike burial, if you move, your horse cremains can move with you. You also have the option of selecting a specific urn for the cremains that memorializes your friend and companion in a manner that is special to you. There are numerous options available, ranging in price from \$60 to \$500. Most cremation fees include the return of your horse's cremains in a temporary urn.

Regardless of what option of disposal you choose for your horse, know that you have choices. It is very difficult, sad, and emotional to think of the loss of your beloved equine friend and companion. However, if you plan ahead, when this inevitable day comes, you will still cry and you will still mourn; but hopefully it will be less stressful.

"Euthanasia is one of those endings that no one likes to think about. But, just as we would prepare ourselves with a first aid kit and receive training for CPR, it is something that we need to think about ahead of time. For the animal's sake, it is something we need to prepare ourselves for and not shrink from when the time occurs. It is a time when I have gained the most respect for some of my clients as they came to terms with the fatal nature of the situation, and in a manner of personal bravery, made a clear decision in the best interest of the horse they loved." - Fairfield Bain, DVM, MS, Dipl. ACVIM, Dipl. ACVP [www.TheHorse.com; article #10911]