



After death – taking care of your cat's body

It might not be something you like to think about, but understanding the options available to you after your cat has died may be helpful when making decisions about what to do with their body.

Losing a pet can be distressing and thinking about things like after death body care and making decisions about it can be more difficult during these times of stress and sadness. If it is possible to think about these things in advance, you may have more opportunity to give some thought to how you want to care for your cat after they have died.

Talk to your veterinary practice to find out what options are available to you. Generally after death, pets are cremated or buried.

Cremation

Communal cremation: where several animals will be cremated together and therefore it is not possible for you to get your cat's ashes back. While it is a common belief that the ashes from communal cremations are scattered at the crematorium, in many cases the ashes will be buried at a licensed site for practical reasons. The individual crematorium should be able to tell you what happens at their site if you wish to know.

Individual cremation: this option is more personal and you will usually have the option to have your cat's ashes returned to you. In an individual cremation a pet may be cremated in the crematory on its own or commonly on an individual tray with other pets on individual trays. If it is important to you that your cat is cremated individually then do ask about the process at the veterinary practice's preferred cremation service.

Individual cremations are generally more expensive than communal cremations so ask your veterinary practice about the costs involved.

Many crematoria and cremation services will allow pet owners to visit them and see the facilities so that you can know exactly what will happen to your pet during cremation.

You may be able to choose the type of container to have the ashes kept in. Some facilities may offer different designs – ask to see a brochure if possible so that you can choose.

Home burial

Some people prefer to take their cat home to bury in the garden. There is no formal planning required for burying a cat at the home it lived in as long as you own the land and the vet has said that there is no risk to other animals or people. If in doubt, speak to your local authority.

The grave should be at least 1.25 metres deep and the site should be three metres away from water sources, cables and pipes where possible. Often people plant a bush or tree over the spot or even place a pot or slab over the site to mark it and to prevent other animals from digging in that area.

The benefits of burying at home include being able to visit your cat at any time and you may feel closer to your cat being at home. However, you might think about whether you are likely to move home in the future and what this might mean in terms of either relocating your cat's remains or leaving them behind. You might consider burying your pet in a large pot as this can be easier in the event of a house move.

Pet cemeteries

Choosing a pet cemetery is another option if you don't have the facility to bury at home or do not want cremation.

While it can be an expensive service, it is often very personal. Often costs will include purchase of the plot, an annual maintenance or rental fee and a coffin (which the cemetery may ask that you buy from them). Some cemeteries also have license to conduct human cremations and burials and this allows for you and your cat to be buried in close proximity and remain together after death.

Some points to remember

- Planning in advance can save you from making difficult decisions when you are distressed. Sometimes planning isn't possible if your cat's death is sudden, but if you can think ahead you may find it helpful
- Each veterinary surgery has different options available so check what is offered by your veterinary practice
- If your cat is going to remain at the veterinary practice for any length of time it will be kept in cold storage. Usually veterinary staff will place your cat in a comfortable position before they are put into storage and it can be helpful to provide their favourite bed or blanket for them to be positioned in
- If you choose a communal cremation you will not usually have your cat's ashes returned to you
- If you choose an individual cremation and choose to have your cat's ashes returned, be aware that collecting the ashes can be a difficult thing to do. Some are not able to collect their pet's ashes immediately as it feels too raw for them – so be aware of it and plan for it. Perhaps a friend can come with you for support or ask a family member to collect them on your behalf. Usually the veterinary practice or crematorium is happy to look after them for several weeks until you feel able to do so.