



Nature's Sanctuary at West Laurel Hill



This photo taken in 2013, prior to kickoff, depicts the condition of the site prior to design. The original green burial area had been taken over by invasive plant species.



Goats were employed for the initial invasive remediation of the site. Also a huge hit with the public, the goats are brought back annually to clear invasive plant material, and participate in the annual Sustainability Fair.



Leave a Perpetual Legacy

In Nature's Sanctuary at West Laurel Hill

In 2008, Nature's Sanctuary became the first natural burial ground in the Philadelphia area to be certified by the Green Burial Council.

Nature's Sanctuary offers green burial that meets and exceeds requirements with a unique site maintenance program that allows for a process of **assisted ecological succession**.

At each stage of the process, this site is **maintained** by a carefully designed **management plan** which **promotes** high quality **native species** that add value to the site as habitat, with minimal disturbance.

ASSISTED ECOLOGICAL SUCCESSION

As green burial properties are filled, they are transitioned from a maintained meadow state into a successional meadow. Old growth hardwood forests native to Eastern Pennsylvania are the result of land being left to heal and regenerate over time.

Ecological succession is the natural process by which a forest site recovers from a disturbance that destroys or removes all its plant life, returning it to its climax forest state. Succession is broken down into a series of stages.

CLIMAX FOREST ←

The trees grow large enough that their canopies create full shade. The site is now a CLIMAX FOREST where the trees can grow to their maximum size. **Minimal maintenance is required at this stage.**

SUCCESSIONAL FOREST ←

As the trees expand, they begin to create a new environment called a SUCCESSIONAL FOREST. Meadow plants are replaced with shade plants. **Continued monitoring for invasives is needed.**

SUCCESSIONAL FOREST ←

Over time, small, tough, fast growing trees and shrubs begin to grow among the grasses to create a SUCCESSIONAL OLD FIELD with high species diversity. **Maintenance is required to prevent invasive species from taking over.**

MEADOW ←

The process begins with grasses, wildflowers and other plants in the form of a MEADOW, which restores the soil and prevents erosion after the disturbance event. **Native plants are used to sow the site.**



The "Assisted Ecological Succession" concept. The first installation is a native meadow. The meadow will evolve first into the shrub and sapling stage, then the pole stage, and eventually climax forest with the assistance of maintenance personnel.



Construction began during the summer of 2014, soil was removed to a 4' depth and re-mediated on-site. Great care was taken not to disturb any of the remains that had been previously interred.



Soil replaced, pathways and memorial wall in progress.



September 2016, families of the interred joined the project team in a planting event to connect with the departed.



This photo taken in 2015, shows Nature's Sanctuary during its first growing season, primarily a colony of Rudbeckia, the image helps to show how the site has rapidly changed since construction.



July 2017, the second growing season, additional species begin to thrive.



The apiary directly west of Nature's Sanctuary, has been instrumental in the success of the plants in the garden. The landscape architecture team was also contracted to design educational signs for the site.



Constructed in late 2018, the raingarden is the newest addition to Nature's Sanctuary, serving runoff from both the garden and nearby cemetery drive.



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At each stage of the process, this site is **maintained** by a carefully designed **management plan** which promotes high quality **native species** that add value to the site as habitat, with minimal disturbance.

ASSISTED ECOLOGICAL SUCCESSION

All green burial properties are filled, they are transplanted from a maintained meadow area into a successional meadow. Old growth hardwood forests native to Eastern Pennsylvania are the source of local trees left to stand and regenerate over time.

Ecological succession is the natural process by which a landscape recovers from a disturbance that destroys or removes all its plants life, returning it to its climax forest state. Succession is broken down into a series of stages.

<h4>CLIMAX FOREST</h4> <p>The trees grow large enough that their canopies create full shade. The site is now a CLIMAX FOREST where the trees can grow to their maximum size. Minimal maintenance is required at this stage.</p>	<h4>SUCCESSIONAL FOREST</h4> <p>As the trees expand, they begin to create a new environment called a SUCCESSIONAL FOREST. Meadow plants are replaced with shade plants. Continued monitoring for invasives is needed.</p>	<h4>SUCCESSIONAL FOREST</h4> <p>Over time, small, tough, fast growing trees and shrubs begin to grow among the grasses to create a SUCCESSIONAL FOREST with high species diversity. Maintenance is required to prevent invasive species from taking over.</p>	<h4>MEADOW</h4> <p>The process begins with grasses, wildflowers and other plants in the form of a MEADOW, which restores the soil and prevents erosion after the disturbance event. Native plants are used to sow the site.</p>
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2018
SITES GOLD

In June of 2018, the site was Dedicated as SITES Gold-Level Certified. It was the 9th Gold-Level landscape and the first cemetery in the world to achieve this certification.



Nancy Goldenberg, President and CEO of both West Laurel Hill and Laurel Hill Cemetery speaks at the dedication ceremony. Her leadership and commitment to the project has been instrumental in the success of the project.



Thank you for volunteering to evaluate the hard work of the Pennsylvania - Delaware Chapter of ASLA .