



## Tall Grass Prairie and Harvest Burial Gown

Sherry Haar, Kansas State University

Keywords: natural, dye, sustainable, burial

Advocacy, education, and interest are on the rise for green burials. A green or sustainable burial is ‘a way of caring for the dead with minimal environmental impact that aids in the conversation of natural resources, reduction of carbon emissions, protection of worker health, and the restoration and-or preservation of habitat (Green Burial Council, 2022a, p. 1). There are currently 354 certified green burial cemeteries in the United States and Canada, a 21% increase from the year prior (Webster, 2022). In addition, biodegradable burial products to cover the body are increasing (2021 Annual Report, Green Burial Council, 2022b). Shrouds or winding sheets in linen and cotton are the predominate textile product offering. Most are undyed, however, eco-printing by bundling plants on the textile is being practiced as part of the burial ritual (Southern Oregon Guild of Artists & Artisans, 2021; Giblin, 2022). While limited, there have been garments designed for or to explore green burial garment options or death awareness (De Ferrer, 2020; Haar, 2017; Hahn & Collier, 2021; Interlandi, 2020; Michel & Lee, 2017; Stone-Francois, 2013; TED Global 2011).

The aim of the textile design for this green burial design was to focus on place-based dyes and prints. This meant dyeing with plants native of tall grass prairies, including goldenrod, ironweed, sunflower, coreopsis, as well as Osage orange wood chips. For the print, the aim was to capture the essence of the tall grass prairie (Figure 1) through contact printing. Contact printing, also called botanical and eco-printing, is the transfer of plant chlorophyll to fiber through contact between fiber and plant (Flint, 2008; Kadolph & Casselman, 2004). The process was to sandwich grasses and plants between damp, pre-mordanted naturally fibered fabrics and then firmly roll the fabric onto a tube. A piece of plastic was also included as the bottom layer to prevent bleed between rolled layers. Additional pressure was created by winding electric tape down the rolled tube. The tube was steamed for 90 minutes in a vertical steamer. The result was the transfer of grass seed, leaves, and stems onto both fabrics (Figure 2).

The garment design inspiration started with thinking about the quick Ukrainian weddings and burials resulting from the Russian invasion of Ukraine. As a European Slovakian descendent, I was drawn to the wedding couples wearing traditional dress. Thus, European folk influences in the design were drawn from gathered blouses, puff sleeves, bodice lacings, aprons, and head wreaths. While considering size-ability and ease of dressing the body, lacing was further considered from early-mid 15<sup>th</sup> C. dress of Italy as used with detachable sleeves, side-less overdress, and shirred underdress (Laver, 1960).

**Figure 1.** *Collection of tall grass prairie plants*



**Figure 2.** *Unrolling of fabrics after steaming*



Reflective Analysis. The fabrics used were hemp/silk shantung, hemp muslin, silk/linen gauze, silk/cotton woven check, silk crepe de chine, cotton gauze, bamboo/spandex jersey knit, and unbleached cotton twill and bias tape. Thus, the 5% spandex in the bamboo knit of the underdress is not biodegradable and would need to be replaced with all natural fibered fabric. The remaining cellulose and protein fibers would biodegrade and provide soil biodiversity (Michel & Lee, 2017). The coloration from local plants allows the dye to be returned to its soil, thus supporting a soil-to-soil system (Burgess, 2019). However, less energy could be used by using solar energy in place of electric for dyeing and steaming. Further, reusable fabric strips could be used in place of electric tape for tube wrapping.

Garment design and sewing methods used to support biodegradability were use of cotton thread, raw fabric edges in place of enclosed facings and turned hems, and use of stable fabrics in areas that would normally use non-woven interfacing. The underdress is sizable through shirring cotton twill tape through stitched casings at the neck, sleeve band, and high waist. The veil, long skirt, and sleeve lengths are meant to cover the limbs as currently practiced in green burials. The overdress is laced at the shoulder and bodice side seams. Future garments could incorporate a way for textiles to support bereavement, such as adding more ties that loved ones could write messages upon.

The overall contribution of this green burial garment is the conversations it may generate to create awareness of sustainable design for green burials. We have special garments for other rites of passage (e.g., baptism, graduation, marriage), thus considering our final fashion look, that is also sustainable, is worth pondering. The method of transferring grasses from rolling onto a tube may inspire others to consider their local landscapes, beyond flowers and leaves, when contact printing.

## References

- Burgess, R. (2019). *Fibershed: Growing a movement of farmers, fashion activists, and makers for a new textile economy*. Chelsea Green Publishing.
- De Ferrer, M. (2020, October 16). *Young designer makes eco-friendly burial clothes which form part of the earth*. Euronews.green. <https://www.euronews.com/green/2020/06/26/what-should-we-wear-to-our-graves-the-environmental-impact-of-burial-clothes>
- Flint, I. (2008). *Eco colour: Botanical dyes for beautiful textiles*. Murdoch Books.
- Giblin, L. (2022, May 15). *Natural burial shrouds*. Day Keeper. <https://www.daykeeper.com.au/natural-burial-shrouds>
- Green Burial Council. (2022a, May 17). *Welcome*. <https://greenburialcouncil.org>
- Green Burial Council. (2022b, May 17). *2021 Annual Report*. <https://www.greenburialcouncil.org/annualreport-2021.html>
- Haar, S. (2017). *Garden series. Burial pantsuit half-scale prototype*. International Textile and Apparel Association Conference Design Exhibition, St. Petersburg, FL. <https://www.iastatedigitalpress.com/itaa/article/id/1697/>
- Hahn, K., & Collier, A. (2021). *The chrysalis shroud for transgender*. Breaking Boundaries: Design Exhibition Catalog. International Textile and Apparel Association, Virtual Annual Conference.
- Interlandi, P. (2020). *Garments for the grave*. Pia Interlandi. <http://www.piainterlandi.com/garments-for-the-grave/>
- Kadolph, S. J., & Casselman, K. D. (2004). In the bag: Contact natural dyes. *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal*, 22(1/2), 15-21.
- Laver, J. (1960). *The concise history of costume and fashion*. Harry N. Abrams, Inc.
- Michel, G. M., & Lee, Y. (2017). Cloth(ing) for the dead: Case study of three designers' green burial practices. *Fashion and Textiles*, 4(4). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40691-017-0088-y>
- Southern Oregon Guild of Artists & Artisans. (2021, July 25). *Death & dyeing: Natural burial shrouds with Angela Franklin*. [Video]. Youtube. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F9\\_a27xcKnI](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F9_a27xcKnI)
- Stone-Francois, M. (Director). (2013, Sep. 20). *Mark Mitchell: Burial. September 20<sup>th</sup> 2103, Frye Art Museum*. [Video]. Youtube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JYewNSIhRNI>
- TED Global (2011, July 15). *Jae Rhim Lee: My mushroom burial suit* [video]. Youtube. [https://www.ted.com/talks/jae\\_rhim\\_lee\\_my\\_mushroom\\_burial\\_suit](https://www.ted.com/talks/jae_rhim_lee_my_mushroom_burial_suit)
- Webster, L. (2022, May 28). *Green burial cemeteries in the US and Canada*. New Hampshire Funeral Resources, Education & Advocacy. <https://www.nhfuneral.org/green-burial-cemeteries-in-the-us-and-canada.html>

