



A liturgy for planting a tree, shrub or flowers in memory of a loved one

Loss and Life

When someone we love dies, our world can be thrown into disarray. We have a funeral, but then what? As life attempts to return to 'normal', we discover that grief is a journey. We might find ourselves ambushed by a sudden memory, triggered by something that reminds us of them. Or days when difficult emotions such as anger, guilt or despair may overtake us. Grief is a journey, and relearning how to live without the person we have loved and lost is different for everyone.

Many people find it helpful to have a place to visit, where they can remain connected to their loved one who remains part of us as our life continues on. Trees, shrubs and flowers can be planted as living memorials of those we have loved, a sign of God's nurture and care of our loved one – planted in the garden, nourished by the soil, sun and rain – or a living thing for us to nurture with care in a pot on the windowsill or balcony.

This resource

This resource is intended to help a small group of family or friends who wish to plant a tree, shrub or flowers in memory of their loved one. You could plant it on a special day – a birthday, wedding anniversary or the anniversary of someone's death – or at any time after the death of a loved one. You might want to plant something at home or in another place

with permission (for example, in a community garden). You could lead yourselves in a liturgy of planting – a suggested order is below – or you could invite a minister to lead you in this.

What to plant

You might like to choose a tree, shrub or flower that has a specific connection to your loved one. Did they have a favourite plant or colour? What flowers or produces fruit around the time of their birthday? Is there a tree or flower connected to a place they loved? Some plants are given names like 'Rambling Rosie' or 'Toby' (often roses, pot plants and apple trees).¹ Trees can have symbolic meanings, for example, oak is associated with courage and strength.² Browse the Internet or visit a garden centre for ideas.

Where and when you plant is important. Some trees can survive in pots, but you need to choose the right variety (for example, dwarf fruit trees) for them to thrive. Most trees are best planted straight into the ground in spring or autumn, so if you want to plant a tree and don't have a garden, it would be best to plant a tree somewhere else with permission. If you want to plant bulbs, check which time of year they need to be planted.³ Most bulbs and shrubs can be planted in containers or straight into a garden bed. If you intend to move house in the future, you might want to plant in a public place which you can continue to visit, or in a container which you can take with you.

Environmental impact

Trees imported from abroad can introduce foreign pests and diseases that spread and kill other trees, so check your tree sapling has been UK sourced and grown.⁴ If you are buying compost to plant in containers, ensure that it is peat-free.

¹ 'Rambling Rosie', *British Roses*: <https://www.britishroses.co.uk/acatalog/Rambling-Rosie.html#SID=12>,

'Toby', *Patch Plants*: <https://www.patchplants.com/gb/en/plants/phlebodium-aureum-263>

² 'Memorial trees and other natural memorials', *Funeral Guide*: <https://www.funeralguide.co.uk/help-resources/arranging-a-funeral/funeral-guides/memorial-trees-and-other-natural-memorials>

³ 'Bulbs: planting', *RHS Gardening*: <https://www.rhs.org.uk/Advice/Profile?PID=95>

⁴ 'UK sourced and grown trees: why is it important to buy them?', *Woodland Trust*: <https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/plant-trees/uk-sourced-and-grown/>

Stories (shared with permission)

Here are some stories from others who have planted a tree or flowers in memory of loved ones.

"We have a red oak planted in memory of our little baby boy. I chose it because they live for a long time, so unlike a flower it won't just go away, and because he was born in autumn which is when the oak has red leaves. We planted it somewhere public (not in our garden), so that even if we moved house (which we did!) we could still visit it."

"I have a few plants that I have grown directly from cuttings taken from the gardens of special people who have passed away which I really value. I also grow red geraniums and dark pink fuscias every year, because I associate them strongly with people I love and miss. I like the yearly ritual of going to the garden centre and choosing them to choose to remember those people each year."

"We planted a silver birch for Dad when he died because he always liked these trees. Their silver bark is very distinctive. A silver birch means protector - Dad was our protector. It also means new beginnings - he would have wanted us to look forward with hope, and not back with regret."

A Liturgy for Planting

A liturgy gives a rhythm and framework into which a group of people can hope to relax and follow an order of activity together. Each person will bring different hopes for this time, and memories and feelings about the person whom you are remembering. The journey of grief takes a different form for every person. It is ongoing, and giving this time to remember may unearth unexpected emotions. Don't worry if you find anger, guilt, frustration or impatience emerging. Or if you feel happy and content at this time while others are visibly sad. Give permission for tears – yours or other people's – they can bring release and healing from stored up emotion and sorrow.

The following order gives suggestions which can be adapted for your own planting in memory of your loved one. It can be followed formally or informally, whichever is most helpful for your purposes. It is intended for a small intimate group of close family or friends, to allow everyone to be involved in the act of planting and in the prayers and readings. This is a Christian liturgy, designed to help those entering into it to know that we are in the presence of a loving God, who cares for us, our loved ones and the earth which God has created. It is intended to be accessible for those who are not familiar with Christian worship or the Christian faith, as well as those who are, and can be used whether the loved one we are remembering was a Christian or not, or if their faith was unknown.

Sharing food, sharing memories

Sharing food and drink can be a helpful focal point for gathering and celebrating the life of a loved one. You could drink a beer or glass of bubbly at home, or have tea, coffee and cake, or take a picnic to a community garden. Sharing memories and talking about your loved one is important. Don't be afraid of visible emotions. Allow time for this before or after the more formal suggested order below, which gives a framework for prayer, readings and planting.

Gathering

Remaining seated around the table or on the picnic rug, ask one person to say these words, or say them aloud together.

Today we come together
to remember [person's name] before God
and to plant [name of tree/shrub/flowers] in [his/her/their] memory

Optional prayer:

God with us,
we thank you because you made us in your own image
and gave us gifts in body, mind and spirit.
We thank you now for [person's name]
and what [he/she/they] meant to each of us.
As we honour [his/her/their] memory,
make us more aware that you are the one
from whom comes every perfect gift,
including the gift of eternal life through Jesus Christ.
Amen.⁵

Reading(s)

Choose one or two readings in advance and ask different people to read them. You may have a favourite, or your loved one may have had a favourite.

Here are some ideas.

Bible readings

*Psalms 1:1-3, Psalm 23, Psalm 139:1-18,
Jeremiah 17:7-8, John 14:1-7, Revelation 22:1-5*

Poems

Woodland Burial – Pam Ayres
The Bright Field – R.S. Thomas
Saying Yes to Life – Francis Simon
God's Garden – Dorothy Frances Gurney

⁵ Church of England and Archbishops' Council, *Common Worship: Pastoral Services* (London: Church House Pub., 2011), 335.

Prayers

Prepare your own prayers or take some time to informally write some together now. You could get paper and pens ready beforehand. Or, if you are comfortable to, speak some spontaneous prayers aloud. Or you could ask a church representative to lead you in prayer here.

You could pray about some of these things.

- Thanksgiving for the person you are remembering
- Telling God about your feelings about them, their life or their death
- Asking for any forgiveness or reconciliation you feel you need
- Prayers for others who are grieving
- Prayers for the world
- Prayers for one another

After these prayers, you could say this one together.

Lord God, Creator of all,
you have made us creatures of this earth,
and have also promised us a share in life eternal.
According to your promises,
may all who have died in the peace of Christ
share with your saints in the joy of heaven,
where there is neither sorrow nor pain
but life everlasting.
Amen.⁶

Planting

Plant your tree, shrub, flowers, bulbs or seeds together. You might like to do this in silence or with relaxed chatter – it will probably be necessary to communicate as you plant, to work together. Remember to take your time, follow the instructions that came with your plant so it has the best chance of surviving, and to water it in.

⁶ *Common Worship: Pastoral Services*, 341.

Pause for reflection

Take some time to look at what you have planted, a promise of hope for the future (it may be just earth covered over bulbs or seeds, but think about what is underneath the ground, beginning to grow). You might like to sit and listen to the sounds of the garden if you are outside. Or you could play a piece of music.

Here are two ideas for musical recordings.

Jesus Christ the Apple Tree – choral version, or song by Jane Siberry

The Lord's My Shepherd – traditional hymn, or modern hymn by Stuart Townend

A prayer to end

We commend ourselves, our loved one and what we have planted to God's care using our own prayers or one of the following prayers.

You could say this prayer together, or ask one person to speak on behalf of all.

Loving Lord God, heartbeat of all creation,
Thank you for today, for this place and these people.
Would you meet us in earth, in seed and soil and in each other,
Would you meet us in the beautiful ordinary,
Meet us in hard work and play and a great cup of tea.
Sing us to stillness, and guide us to peace
Close to all that is created.
May your love take root in us
Growing deep so we know that we and all creation belong,
and that all shall be well and all manner of things shall be well.
Bless this day, all that is growing, all that is complete,
all that is yet to be finished.
That all may be in you
and you may be in all.
Amen.⁷

Or

God be in my head,
and in my understanding;
God be in my eyes,
and in my looking;

⁷ 'Hazelnut Prayer', *Hazelnut Community Farm*, reproduced with permission.
<https://hazelnutcommunityfarm.com/resources/prayers-for-after-a-time-of-community-work>

God be in my mouth,
and in my speaking;
God be in my heart,
and in my thinking;
God be at my end,
and at my departing.
Amen.⁸

⁸ *Common Worship: Pastoral Services*, 377.