

Supply List for Headstone Cleaning
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Warning:

- Do not clean headstones when it will be under 40 degrees within the next 24 hours.
- Do not clean headstones without permission from the manager/caretaker of the property.
- Do not use powertools, powerwasher, metal tools, etc. When cleaning.
- Investigate the stability of the area that you are cleaning.
- Never use bleach. Never. Not once. Save it for laundry.

Safety

- Safety glasses
 - I'm legally obligated to list these.

Cleaning agent: D/2 Biological Solution - For Biological Growth.

- 1- Quart of D/2 can conservatively clean 10 upright headstones.
- 1-gallon (128 oz.) of D/2 can conservatively clean 40 upright headstones.
- Follow mixing instructions

Cleaning agent: Orvus Paste - For Dirt

- One large jug will last longer than you will.
 - Can be purchased online or at western supply stores.

Scrub brush: Magnolia Brush with Tampico natural bristles

- Magnolia Brush model 179-T for medium to large hands
- Magnolia Brush model 161 for small to medium hands
- Water: six 1-gallon jugs of clean water in a large plastic bin when traveling to a cemetery to clean headstones.
 - 2-gallons of clean water are needed to clean 1 upright headstone.
 - 1-gallon of clean water is needed to clean 1 ground level grave marker.
 - Distilled water is preferred. Never rely on local water.

Spray bottle for squirting clean water

- I prefer a wide bottom spray bottle to avoid tipping on uneven ground.
- Some people prefer a 1-gal or 2-gal pump up sprayer.
- Standard weed sprayer works as well.
 - Do not use if previously held toxic chemicals.

Plastic Scraper

- Never use metal on a stone.
- Can be plastic paint scraper, cooking scraper.
 - Some facilities will not allow plastic of any kind. Switch to paint stir sticks.

Detail Work

- Toothbrushes: I purchase multi-packs of quality toothbrushes at retail stores.
- Wooden skewers - for getting inside letters/numbers.

Surround work

- Bench broom aka foxtail: for brushing sand off the surface of the headstone.

- Garden trowl: for removing accumulated debris from atop or around base of stone.
- Garden shears: for cutting away vines, shrubs, weeds, roots, and small trees.
- Garden loppers: for cutting away substantial growth.
- Manual hedge trimmers: for cutting grass and weeds around the base of the stone.
- Gardening gloves
- Rubber gloves
- Scissors: for cutting grass and weeds around the base of a stone.

Carrying Device

- Tool tote: I prefer a cleaning supplies tote, or a 5-gallon bucket can also work.

Optional

- Flag holders: I use 15" segments of ½ inch PVC pipe, or you can purchase them.
- Grave flags: 8" x 12" American flags on 24" wooden sticks. I prefer grave flags with stitching around the edges, because they seem to last longer. Amazon.com has a good selection!
- Plastic Zip ties: I tighten a zip tie on my grave flags about 5" from bottom of stick.

Do No Harm

- **Cleaning to read what is on a stone is a byproduct of preservation. Do not rush.**

Assorted Materials for viewing the Inscription:

- Cheap aluminum foil
- Painting tape
- Mirror

Links for reference:

VA Cemetery Cleaning Guidelines

<https://www.cem.va.gov/hmm/cleaning.asp>

Illinois Preservation Guide

<https://dnrhistorical.illinois.gov/preserve/cemetery.html>

NPS Cemetery Video

<https://www.nps.gov/media/video/view.htm?id=051cb6bd-8f62-48f4-9df5-5c0116ee013f#:~:text=The%20general%20guideline%20is%20that.biocides%20and%20intermediate%20water%20mistings.>

6 Common Stones Used in Graves

The material used in a graveyard can offer clues as to what stones were readily available in the community and provide a glimpse into the socioeconomic status of its residents:



1 FIELDSTONES (1600s–present), easy to find and carve, were the original markers used to designate graves.



2 SLATE (1600s–1900s) is found mainly in the Eastern United States, with Boston as the home of the largest number of these gray, Colonial-era grave markers. Slate can withstand the physical freeze-thaw cycle of weathering fairly well, and acid rain doesn't appear to cause much damage. But slate is porous, making it vulnerable to delamination, which separates the stone into layers.



3 SANDSTONE (1650s–late 1800s) was a popular grave marker, thanks to its availability and ease of carving. Available in shades of red, tan and brown, sandstone is fairly porous and tends to spall or flake apart and separate via delamination. If lichen or mold grows between its layers, the stone's sheets will fall away.



4 LIMESTONE (mid-1700s–1930s) was a favorite in Midwestern cemeteries, where it was quarried in abundance. Ranging in color from light brown to gray to white, it's very easy to carve. But weathering and acid rain do a number on these markers, causing them to pit. Those depressions on the stone's surface make reading inscriptions difficult. Sulphur dioxide in the air can also loosen and damage the surface, resulting in a "sugaring" roughness.



5 MARBLE (1780s–1930s) has been used for centuries for monuments and mausoleums due to its strength and beauty. Marble is a form of limestone, and can range from pure white to white with bluish, pink or gray veins running through it. While this is a strong stone, it's no match for the effects of acid rain, which makes the surface grainy and the lettering soft and fuzzy as it slowly fades away.



6 GRANITE (1780s–present) is one of the most durable cemetery stones. Soft lettering and pitting on the surface are usually the first indications that chemical weathering (e.g., acid rain) is taking a toll, but granite is otherwise slow to deteriorate. Once difficult to carve, granite has remained popular thanks to modern laser-cutting techniques. In fact, many newer cemeteries allow only granite markers to be erected.