

MONUMENT MAINTENANCE

At this time, Russellville Oakland Cemetery has no plans to clean any of the stones/markers located in the cemetery. While we did launch a program in the summer of 2015 to straighten, raise, and level them as needed, our budgets do not allow for a cleaning schedule. It is the sole responsibility of the families to clean them. We can offer some ideas, however, it is our recommendation you contact your local monument company for tips on how to safely clean grave stones.

There are various opinions on how to clean grave markers. They range from pressure washers to scrubbing by hand. Most recommend that every ten years is the most often grave markers should be cleaned. Do not clean slate stones that have begun to peel or chip. Do not clean limestone or sandstone more than once every 18 months. Every cleaning removes some of the face of the stone. However, occasionally rinsing with clean water to remove bird droppings and other accretions is acceptable.

Grave marker repairs should only be done by professionals, such as monument companies.

Pressure washers may be used to clean granite stones, however be aware that some of the newer stones have darkened lettering (paint) and pressure washing may remove it. Pressure washers can be used on marble stones, but again be aware there is a risk of damage to the stone. It is best to hire a professional.

Most generally the professionals use similar methods, with some variances. The safest way to clean stones is to use good old fashioned elbow grease, which includes a mild soap, water and a stiff scrub brush. Avoid wire brushes as they may cause chipping or other damage. It is best to use a non-ionic cleaner to clean headstones. These cleaners are available at various locations that sell photography, janitorial and conservations supplies. They do not produce the salts that can be harmful and leave additional staining. They also aid in the wetting of masonry so that the soil and dirt can be removed more effectively.

Choose your cleaning product carefully and always test a small, hidden area first to ensure it creates the desired results. Though the specialized cleaners may be more expensive, they are more effective and better designed for cleaning these stones than regular household granite cleaners. Wet the entire stone to remove any loose dirt, then keep the stone as wet as possible throughout the entire washing process.

Using natural-bristled, wooden handled brushes of various sizes. The use of plastic handles is not recommended as color from the handles may leave material on the stone that will be very difficult to remove. Toothbrushes are a good tool to use as well as the scrub brushes. Do not use wire brushes or metal tools, as those items can cause damage to the grave marker.

When cleaning marble or limestone, one tablespoon of household ammonia can be added to help remove some greases and oils. Do not use ammonia on or near any bronze or other metal elements. Lichens and algae can be removed by first thoroughly soaking the stone and then using a wooden scraper to gently remove the biological growth. This process may need to be repeated several times. Wooden picks, such as toothpicks or shish kabob skewers are also useful. Remember, not all stains can be removed by non-professionals, so the stone may not look new cleaning.