Days to Display Your Flag

All national and state holidays and on historic and special occasions.

January 1 - New Year's Day
January 20 - Inauguration Day
Third Monday in January - Martin Luther King's Birthday
February 12 - Lincoln's Birthday
February 22 - Washington's Birthday
April 6 - Army Day
Easter
2nd Sunday in May - Mother's day
Memorial Day (half-staff until noon)
June 14 - Flag Day
July 4 - Independence Day
1st Monday in September - Labor Day
September 17 - Citizenship Day
October 12 - Columbus Day
October 27 - Navy Day
November 11 - Veteran's Day
4th Thursday in November - Thanksgiving Day
December 25 - Christmas Day
Days proclaimed by the President
Days of states' admission to the Union

Certain holidays will be celebrated on Mondays, or on the date traditionally recognized for that holiday, according to state option. If your state has not enacted the necessary legislation, the flag may be flown on both the Monday holiday and on the traditional date for the holiday.

Courtesy of:

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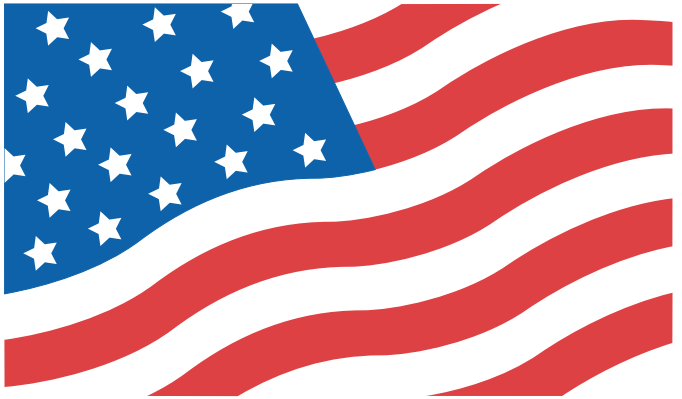
The American Flag



Our flag...
stands for generations of individuals who have never stopped believing in the principles of liberty, equality and justice.

Our flag...
13 red & white stripes waving freely in the wind, proudly guarding a field of blue with 50 white stars is a symbol of deeply held beliefs that have kept our country strong and free.

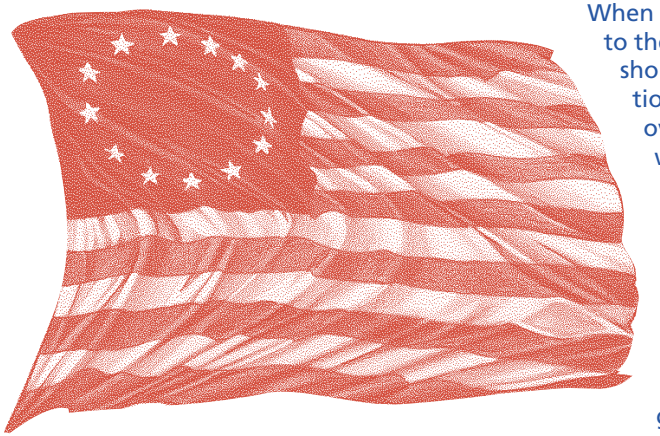
Our flag...
carries poignant memories of our Nation's triumphant past, and bears a powerful message of hope for the present and future of our Nation and world.

Our flag...
flies to bring the pledge of freedom and justice to all people.

The Stars and Stripes

The "Stars and Stripes"...popular name for the national flag of our United States, represents our country, its people, our government and our national ideals. For many years, it has also stood for liberty, justice, democracy and freedom. Hundreds of millions of people have lived in peace under the flag, but millions have also fought and died under the waving colors of "Old Glory" whenever tyranny and oppression have threatened the republic for which it stands.

The Continental Congress chose red, white and blue as our national colors, although no record has ever been found to show why. In 1782, the Congress of the Confederation again chose red, white and blue for the seal of the United States and also for the national flag. The meaning for the colors: Red, for hardiness and courage; White, for purity and innocence; Blue, for vigilance, perseverance and justice. These colors have remained constant and unchanged throughout the history of our country.



When pledging allegiance to the flag, an individual should stand at attention with their hand over their heart. If wearing a hat, it should be removed and placed over the left shoulder so that the hand is covering the heart. Persons in military uniforms or scouts in uniform should give the proper salute as they pledge allegiance.

The proper etiquette for displaying and carrying the flag is given in the section on "Flag Etiquette." Display your flag proudly. Displaying the flag is the privilege of every citizen of this country.

The History of the Stars and Stripes

On June 14, 1777, the Continental Congress passed the following resolution: "Resolved, that the flag of the thirteen United States be thirteen stripes alternate red and white; that the union be thirteen stars, white in a blue field, representing a new constellation." On that historic day, the flag of the United States of America came into existence and this form remains unchanged to the present day.

Just who designed the first flag or who made it is a question still debated by historians. Some believe that Betsy Ross designed the first flag, although claims have also been made that Francis Hopkinson, a Congressman, designed and made the first flag. Historical records do show that Betsy Ross made flags for the government in 1777, but whether she made the first United States flag will probably always remain in doubt.

In 1782, the Congress of the Confederation reaffirmed the choice of the Continental Congress by stating that the national seal and the flag would remain red, white and blue. Deeper meaning was also given to the flag and its design. The thirteen original states would always be represented by the seven red stripes and the six white ones. However, they left open the question of how the stars on the blue union would be arranged.

In 1777, Congress had not specified any particular design for the arrangement of the stars and some flags had thirteen stars in a circle. Others had twelve in a circle with the thirteenth in the center. By 1782 though, almost all the national flags had the thirteen stars in a circle.

In 1794, Vermont and Kentucky were admitted to the Union bringing the number of states to fifteen. Congress ordered that all new flags would carry fifteen stars and fifteen stripes, and that a star and a stripe would be added as each new state joined the Union. This would later prove to be too cumbersome and would soon be abandoned. This flag, with its fifteen stars and fifteen stripes, is the flag Americans carried in the War of 1812.

By 1817, The Union was expanded by five more states: Tennessee, Ohio, Louisiana, Indiana and Mississippi. This expansion meant a new flag. Samuel C. Reid, a navy captain, redesigned the flag using the original thirteen stripes and adding a star for each of the twenty states. This idea was proposed to Congress by Peter Wendover, a representative from New York. It was passed as the New Flag Act, and the date was set as July 4th next after a new state had been admitted to the Union as the day on which a new flag would be flown. Congress again left open the question of how the stars might be arranged, so the design was left to individual flagmakers.

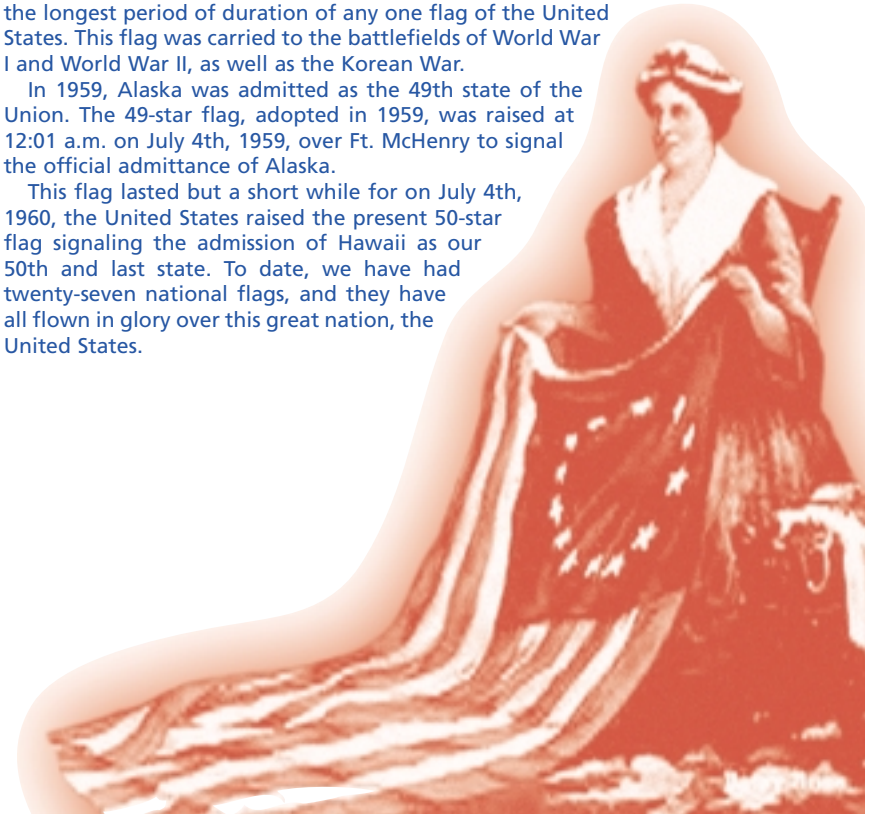
In later years, the President has usually proclaimed how the stars would be arranged and all flags must agree with the Presidential proclamation. New states were constantly being admitted to the Union and the United States had thirteen national flags between 1817 and 1861. During the Civil War, we had another two flags with the admission of Kansas and West Virginia. Union troops fought under a 33-star flag during the first three months of the war; a 34-star flag until 1863; and a 35-star flag until the end of the war. President Lincoln refused to take out the stars of the southern states which had seceded.

After the war had ended, the nation began to move west. Nebraska joined the Union in 1867; followed in 1877 by Colorado; 1890 by North Dakota, South Dakota, Montana, Washington and Idaho; 1891 by Wyoming; 1896 by Utah; and 1908 by Oklahoma. During this period of transition in the country, we had six more national flags. The twenty-third flag, adopted in 1896, was the flag that we fought under during the Spanish-American War in 1898.

In 1912, Arizona and New Mexico were admitted to the Union and thus the United States needed another new flag. This was the twenty-fifth flag, adopted in 1912, and which lasted until 1959. The total of 47 years that this flag flew over the nation represents the longest period of duration of any one flag of the United States. This flag was carried to the battlefields of World War I and World War II, as well as the Korean War.

In 1959, Alaska was admitted as the 49th state of the Union. The 49-star flag, adopted in 1959, was raised at 12:01 a.m. on July 4th, 1959, over Ft. McHenry to signal the official admittance of Alaska.

This flag lasted but a short while for on July 4th, 1960, the United States raised the present 50-star flag signaling the admission of Hawaii as our 50th and last state. To date, we have had twenty-seven national flags, and they have all flown in glory over this great nation, the United States.



27 Flags of the United States

1 1777-1795

The Betsy Ross Flag. To this day, the actual maker of this flag remains unknown. This almost casually constructed national emblem incorporated the unchanging design of thirteen stripes with a thirteen-star union. Although this claim is seriously in doubt, Betsy Ross, a Philadelphia seamstress, is said to have made the first American flag. This claim was first made by William J. Canby, her grandson, in 1870. His claim is based on the signed statements of several persons, including Betsy Ross' daughters, nieces and granddaughters. Historical records do show that she made flags for the government in 1777, but there is no proof she made the first flag. The second claim as the maker of the first flag was by Congressman Francis Hopkinson. Shortly after the adoption of the first flag by Congress in 1777, Hopkinson came forward and asserted that he was the maker of the original flag. This claim is unsubstantiated by historical records, and so the real maker of the flag will probably always remain in doubt. It's unfortunate, for this design has remained unchanged for almost 200 years.

2 1795-1818

In 1791, Vermont was admitted to the Union and the following year Kentucky was also admitted. By 1974, it became apparent to Congress that the country needed a new flag. Congress decided to change the basic structure of the flag and add not only two more stars, but two more stripes. The 15-stripe flag was ordered flown after May 1, 1795. This 15-star flag was flown during the War of 1812 and during the United States' war with the Barbary States. It was this flag that inspired Francis Scott Key to write the "Star-Spangled Banner." It also inspired a heated debate in the Congress over the change from 13 to 15 stripes in the banner. Between 1795 and 1818, five new states were admitted to the Union and a new flag was needed. A navy captain redesigned the flag and returned to the 13 original stripes, but added a star for each new state. Finally, the idea was accepted by Congress because it was easier to change the stars than the stripes. Congress adopted this idea and also stipulated that on the July 4th following the admission of a new state, a new star would be flown in the flag to represent the state.

3 1818

Our third flag saw a return to tradition as Congress decided to return to the thirteen stripes, but to add a star as each new state joined the Union. Designed by navy captain Samuel Reid, this flag was proposed to Congress on April 4, 1818, and changed back to thirteen stripes. This flag had 20 stars and became official July 4, 1818. This flag is also called the "Great Star Flag" because the 20 stars were sometimes arranged to form a star.

4 1819

The 21st star in the flag represented the admission of the state of Illinois on December 3, 1818. The Northwest Territory was rapidly becoming settled and four new states would be carved out of this section of the country. 1818 was also the year that the United States-Canada boundary dispute was settled, making it the longest open border in the world.

5 1820

The hot issue of the day was whether the nation could keep the balance between free and slave states. Alabama was admitted in 1819, giving the country an equal number of both. But in 1820, Maine was admitted as a free state, thus tipping the numbers in favor of the free states. In 1820, our fifth flag appeared with 23 stars in the Union.

6 1822

The Missouri Compromise of 1820 would settle the question of slaves states versus free for 30 years. No state would be admitted to the Union as a slave state above the line 36°-30' in the new Louisiana Purchase. Another tenet of the Compromise was that Missouri would be admitted as the 24th state and take its place alongside the slave states.

7 1836

During the last months of President Andrew Jackson's administration, Arkansas was admitted to the Union as the 25th state. On July 4, 1836, a new flag was flown over the country bearing 25 stars. In the same year, Texas became an independent nation.

1837 8

Michigan, since the days of the Revolutionary War, had been a favorite spot for fur trappers and traders. The Erie Canal, recently opened, allowed travelers and pioneers to move from Albany, New York to Lake Erie. This massive wave of pioneers brought about a growth in Michigan that enabled it to be admitted as the 26th state. In addition, Michigan was given the upper peninsula for giving up land claims in Ohio.

1845 9

Florida, admitted to the Union as the 27th state in 1845, completed the present Atlantic seaboard of the United States. Florida had been purchased from Spain in 1819 after having been a part of the Spanish Empire for 300 years. The southern expansion of the United States was now complete and the nation turned its attention to pushing back western frontiers.

1846 10

Texas had once been an integral part of the Spanish domain on the North American continent. Spain controlled Texas for nearly 300 years until 1821. In 1836, Texas declared its independence from Mexico and became an independent nation. In 1845, President James K. Polk admitted Texas as the 28th state. This action directly led to war with Mexico and thus fixed the southern boundary of Texas as the Rio Grande.

1847 11

In late 1846, the Midwest gave birth to another state - Iowa. Once a part of the Louisiana Purchase, Iowa was admitted to the Union as a free state to become the first free state to come from that purchase. An uprising by the Sioux Indian Nation plagued Iowans during their early years of statehood.

1848 12

Wisconsin preserved the balance that was precariously being kept between free and slave states when admitted to the Union in 1848. There were 15 free and 15 slave states in 1848. During the drive for statehood, the Ripon Convention was held, later to be claimed as the beginnings of the Republican Party.

13 1851

In 1848, the discovery of gold in the American River at Sutter's Mill, CA, touched off the "Gold Rush" of 1849. This set into motion a tide of settlers. Previously in 1846, a small group of Americans had proclaimed California independent from Mexico. The need for immediate government organization led to the admission of California as the 31st state in 1850.

14 1858

In 1851, by the Treaty of Mendota, the Indians gave up all claims to land in Minnesota and throngs of settlers swarmed into the territory. There were enough people in the state to grant admission to the Union and Minnesota became our 32nd state on May 11th of that year.

15 1859

During James K. Polk's presidential campaign, the issue was the Oregon Territory. "Fifty-four forty or Fight" was the slogan. Statehood for Oregon would mean the consolidation of the Pacific coastline as members of the United States. In 1859, Oregon became the 33rd state in the Union. Our 15th flag was raised that year.

16 1861

January 29, 1861, Kansas was admitted to the Union as the 34th state. Kansas had been a state for less than three months when the nation went to war. On April 12, 1861, Confederate batteries opened fire on Ft. Sumter and four years of a bitter civil war battle were fought. This flag was carried into battle by Union troops until 1863. It carried 34 stars.

17 1863

As Virginia decided to throw its lot in with the new Confederacy, several northwestern counties of the state decided to remain loyal to the Union. The result was the formation of a new state, West Virginia, marking the first time a new state has resulted from a rebellion against the original state. This fledgling was admitted as the 35th state, June 20, 1863.

18 1865

The Confederate States of America were in their last hours when Nevada was admitted to the Union as the 36th state. Because the war was ending with the victory of the Union, little jubilation went up for the admittance of Nevada. Little notice was paid to the fact that this flag bore 36 stars when it was raised in 1865.

19 1867

Nebraska applied for admission into the nation as the Reconstruction era opened in American history. A bitter struggle developed between President Andrew Johnson and Congress. President Johnson vetoed the bill making Nebraska the 37th state, but Congress overrode the veto. Nebraska became the 37th state in 1867 and the 37th star on our flag.

20 1877

Gold was discovered in the Colorado Territory in 1858 bringing in thousands of new settlers. Hostile Indians and the extremely hard terrain of the country did not deter the new pioneers. With them, they brought the determination to become a state and in 1876, Colorado was admitted as the 38th state.

21 1890

With the admission of North Dakota, South Dakota, Montana, Washington and Idaho in 1889-90, five new stars were added to our flag. These states were the last of the northwest territories to become states and completed the expansion of the country along the Canadian border. Completion of railroads speeded the growth of these states.

22 1891

The twenty-first flag was obsolete six days after it was raised. On July 10, 1890, Wyoming was admitted to the Union as the 44th state. Wyoming had become a territory in 1845 when Texas was annexed to the United States and relinquished its claim to this area. On July 4th, 1891, the twenty-second flag was raised with 44 stars.

23 1896

Utah became a territory of the United States in 1848. Its first constitution was established in 1849 as the Mormon state of the Deseret. Congress changed the name to Utah in 1850, and a running argument began between Utah and the U.S. Congress over the question of polygamy. In 1890, the Mormon Church outlawed this practice and in 1896, Utah became the 45th state.

24 1908

The Indian Territory of Oklahoma was opened to settlers in 1889 and resulted in the first Oklahoma land run. Thousands of settlers, farmers, ranchers and pioneers rushed into the new territory to begin a new life. This migration resulted in the admission of Oklahoma to the Union on November 16, 1907, as the 46th state.

25 1912

In 1912, New Mexico and Arizona were the 47th and 48th continental states admitted into the union. The 48-star flag came into existence in that year and lasted for 47 years, longer than any other US flag. Under this banner we fought World War I, World War II and the Korean War.

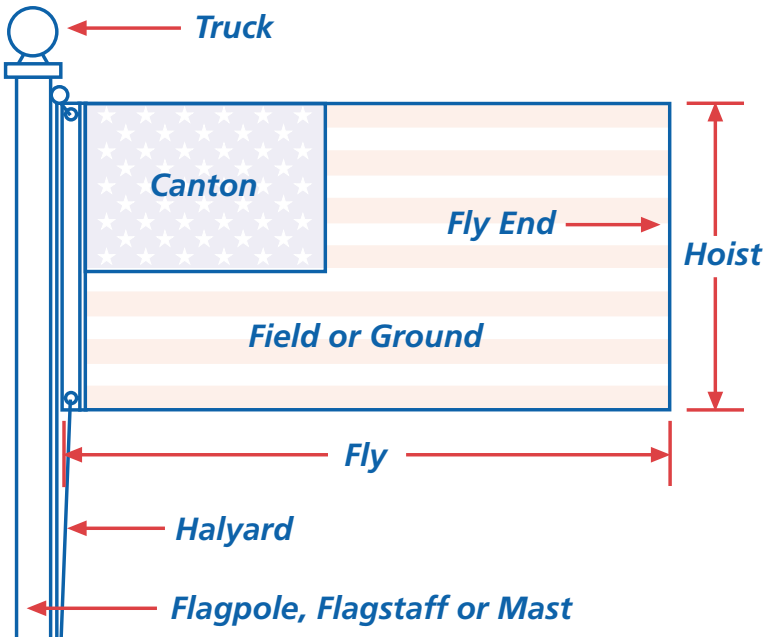
26 1959

On July 7, 1958, President Dwight D. Eisenhower signed the bill making Alaska the 49th state of the Union. The admission of Alaska marked the first time a state had been admitted that had not been in the continental United States. Secretary of State William Seward purchased Alaska from Russia for $7 million, or two cents an acre. Alaska became the 49th star.

27 1960

At Hawaii's request in 1898, Hawaii was annexed by the United States. In 1903, the territorial legislature petitioned Congress for admission to the Union, but was denied. Not much was thought of Hawaii until the bombing of Pearl Harbor when Americans realized what an integral part of the U.S. Hawaii was. On March 18, 1959, Hawaii became our 50th state and the last star in the flag.

Parts of the Flag



The canton is a rectangular space occupying the upper quarter of the flag next to the staff. The remainder of the flag's area is called the field or ground. The hoist is the portion of the flag along the staff; the term also refers to the vertical height of the flag. The horizontal length of the flag is known as the fly. The flag's proportions are regulated by the hoist; the fly is 1.9 times the hoist.

Flag Nomenclature

Battle Flag	Carried by armed forces on land.
Battle Streamer	Designates battles or campaigns, attached to the flag of a military unit.
Breadth	A unit of measurement for flags; one breadth is 9".
Bunting	Decorative cloth bearing the national colors of a country.
Colors	Special U.S. flags carried by the infantry. They are 4'4" wide by 5'6" long.
Ensign	A naval flag. America's Navy uses the "Stars and Stripes" as its ensign.
Garrison Flag	The U.S. flag flown over military posts on special days. It is twice the size of the post flag.
Halyard	The rope or cord used to raise or lower the flag.
Jack	A small flag flown at the bow of a ship. The U.S. Navy jack is the 50 stars in the field of blue. The jack flies from the bow while in port. The ensign flies from the stern while the ship is in motion.
Pennant	A triangular flag.
Post Flag	The standard flag for U.S. Army posts. It is 10' wide by 19' long.
Reeve	To hoist or lower a flag by pulling the halyard through the pulley at the top of the staff.
Staff	The flag pole.
Standard	A 3' by 4' U.S. flag carried by mounted troops of the Army.
Storm Flag	A U.S. flag used by Army posts during inclement weather. It is half the size of a post flag.
Truck	The ornament at the peak of the flag staff, including the pulley for the halyards.
Union	A design or device that symbolizes union. The 50 stars appearing in the canton of the U.S. flag represent the union of the 50 states.

Respect for the Flag

- *The flag should always be carried upright, aloft and free.*
- *The flag should be displayed high above and free of anything beneath it, such as the ground, the floor, water or merchandise.*
- *The flag should always be allowed to fall freely. Use bunting - not the U.S. flag - to drape, festoon, draw back or hang in folds as decoration. Bunting of blue, white and red - always arranged with the blue above, the white in the middle and the red below - should be used for covering a speaker's desk, draping the front of the platform and so on.*
- *The flag should be treated with respect. Protect it from being easily torn, soiled or damaged in any way when fastening, displaying or storing it.*
- *All parts of the flag should be kept completely free of markings, insignias, letters, words, figures, designs, pictures or drawings of any nature not inherent in its creation.*
- *The flag should not be used as an informal covering for a ceiling.*

What the Flag means

A flag, an inanimate object made of stitched cloth, means as much as people will let it mean. Through two centuries of American heritage, our national flag has come to stand for the people, the ideas, the government, and national honor and glory of the United States.

Our flag has endured through many years of hardship and toil. It is known and respected throughout the world. It has come to be the beacon of democracy, freedom, liberty and justice, and it is to this banner the countless millions came from all over the world in their search for political and religious freedom.

Perhaps the modern American has come to take for granted the proud Stars and Stripes. Perhaps the notion that our flag means nothing more than apple pie and the Fourth of July has been allowed to live too long. Let us not forget that this flag was born of blood and has been preserved by blood. This flag is the symbol of liberty and the cost of liberty is dear indeed.

Important Things to Know About Displaying the Flag

When other flags are flown from the same halyard, the United States flag should always be at the peak.

When displaying a flag from a staff projecting from a building, the union of the flag should be placed at the peak of the staff unless the flag is at half-staff.

When displayed against a wall with crossed staffs with another flag, the United States flag should be on the right, (the flag's right) and its staff should be in front of the staff of the other flag.

When another flag or flags are carried in a procession, the US flag should be on the right (the flag's own right) or, if there is a line of other flags, in front of the center of that line.

When a number of state flags, flags of localities, or pennants of societies are grouped and displayed from staffs, the United States flag should be in the center and the highest point in the group.

When suspended over a sidewalk, the flag should be hoisted out, union first, from a rope extending from house to pole at the edge of the sidewalk.

When displayed over a street, the flag should be suspended vertically with the union to the north on an east and west street, or the east on a north and south street.

In times of peace when flags of multiple nations are displayed, fly from separate staffs of the same height. The flags should be of approximately equal size.

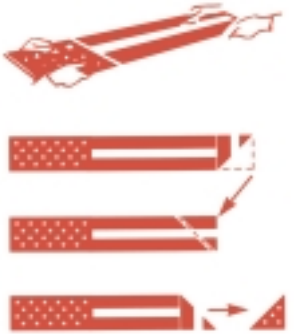
When displayed from a staff in a church or on the speaker's platform in a public auditorium, the flag should occupy the position of honor and be placed at the clergyman's or speaker's right as they face the audience. When the flag is displayed from a staff in a position other than in the chancel or on the platform, it should be placed in the position of honor at the right of the congregation or audience as they face the chancel or platform. Any other flags so displayed should be placed on the left of the congregation or audience as they face the chancel or platform.

When displayed flat against a wall on a speaker's platform, the flag should be placed above and behind the speaker with the union in the upper left corner as the audience faces the flag.

When unveiling a statue or monument, the flag should form a distinctive feature of the ceremony, but it should never be used as the covering for the statue or monument.

When flown at half-staff, the flag should be raised to the peak for an instant and then lowered to the half-staff position. The flag should again be raised to the peak before it is lowered at the end of the day.

When used to cover a casket, the flag should be placed so that the union is at the head and over the left shoulder. The flag should not be lowered into the grave or be allowed to touch the ground.



After you have lowered your flag, take the greatest care that no part of it touches the ground, nor anything beneath it. To store your flag, fold it into the cocked hat design.
To attain this design, fold your flag width-wise twice, leaving the union exposed.
Begin with the striped end and folding into the union, fold the flag into triangles. Take the left hand striped corner and fold it on a diagonal to your right hand. Then fold it straight up. Repeat until only the union is exposed. Take the remaining fold and tuck it inside the folds to hold your flag tightly.
Store in a safe place.

Proper American Flag Disposal

As we approach the fourth of July, many of us think about displaying the American flag on our homes. Maybe it's time to buy a new one because the old one has become too tattered, faded or torn to fly. What do you do with the old one? It can't be recycled and it can't be reused. Old American flags must be properly disposed of. The accepted method of disposal is to burn the flag, however...it is strongly recommended that you contact your local American Legion Post, Boy Scouts of America, or Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) post. They generally have a central collection site where flags are collected and disposed of in a proper ceremony. Many stores will also accept your old flag when you purchase a new one - they generally arrange with the local VFW or American Legion for pickup of used flags.

The Writing of the Star-Spangled Banner

One of the most dramatic episodes in America's patriotic history occurred on September 14, 1814. It was on this day that lawyer and poet, Francis Scott Key, penned our national anthem on the back of an envelope while witnessing the heated British bombardment of Fort McHenry during the war of 1812.

Key had traveled to Chesapeake Bay, where the English fleet was gathered, to plead for the release of his friend, Dr. William Beans, who was being held prisoner. Because the enemy was prepared to attack the fort, they refused to let any Americans leave.

The British fleet poured a blazing shower of shells upon the fortress all during the night. From his place on the battleship, Key could see by the glare of the rockets and the flashes of the cannons that the American flag was still waving triumphantly over Fort McHenry.

It's no wonder that Key found America's mighty banner so inspiring: The "Star-Spangled Banner" that flew on that day was probably the largest flag ever carried into battle, weighing approximately 200 pounds and necessitating a crew of two dozen to carry it. It was 30 feet high and 42 feet long. It is the only official American flag with other than the thirteen stripes, and each of its 15 stripes and 15 stars were two feet wide.

The original Star-Spangled Banner never made another appearance in American history, and its remnants are preserved today at the Smithsonian Institute in Washington, D.C., where it has been partially restored to give viewers a sense of its original dimensions.

As for Francis Scott Key's tribute to the flag, it was officially designated as our National Anthem in 1931. The tune to the anthem is that of a song called "To Anacreon in Heaven," written by John Stafford Smith for an English social club.

Saluting the Flag

When attending a ceremony in which the flag is raised or lowered, or when the flag is passing in a parade or in a review, all present should face the flag and stand at attention. Individuals should remove their hats and hold them over their left shoulder so that the hand is over the heart. People without hats should stand with their right hand over their heart. Those in military uniform should stand at attention and salute. The salute should be rendered at the moment the flag passes.

When the "Star-Spangled Banner" is played at a ceremony, all present should stand and face either the flag or the musician. Those in uniform should salute.

Remain standing, facing the flag or the musician until the national anthem has ended. If a parade passes you, and the flag is there, stand at attention as it passes. The flag is your flag. Respect it as your own. For in reality, it is yours.

The Star-Spangled Banner

O say, can you see by the dawns early light
What so proudly we hail'd at the twilight's last gleaming,
Whose broad stripes and bright stars, through the perilous fight,
O'er the ramparts we watch'd, were so gallantly streaming?
And the rockets red glare, the bombs bursting in air,
Gave proof through the night that our flag was still there.
O say, does that star-spangled banner yet wave
O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave?

-Francis Scott Key

America, the Beautiful

O beautiful for spacious skies,
For amber waves of grain,
For purple mountain majesties
Above the fruited plain!
America! America!
God shed his grace on thee
And crown thy good
With brotherhood
Form sea to shining sea!

-Samuel Ward

The Pledge of Allegiance

I Pledge Allegiance
to the flag of the
United States of America
and to the republic
for which it stands,
one nation under god
indivisible with liberty
and justice for all.