

Flag Etiquette





JOHN SONDERMAN/CREATIVE COMMONS

Flag Dos and Don'ts

There are rules in place for handling and displaying Old Glory, known as the Flag Code.

Compiled by the U.S. House of Representatives' Office of the Law Revision Counsel, these guidelines ensure that you display the flag in the most respectful manner.

DO place the U.S. flag to the right when displayed with any other flag. If part of a group of local or organizational flags, the American flag should be

placed in the center and/or highest point. International flags should be flown at the same height.

DON'T use the flag to cover cushions, as part of a costume, or for advertising purposes. Military personnel, police officers, firemen and patriotic organizations may use a flag patch.

DO follow presidential or governor's orders to fly the flag at half staff. These orders are made after national tragedy or the death of an important person. The flag should be hoisted to its peak before being lowered to half staff. Before it is lowered for the day, the flag should again be raised briefly

to its peak.

DON'T attach anything to a flag. The flag also shouldn't be used as a receptacle of any kind.

DO place the flag to a speaker's right as they face the audience in an indoor meeting or other gathering.

DON'T display a flag with the blue area to the right when looking in from any window. The flag should be on display for those who are outside.

DO position a flag over the middle of a street with the blue field of stars pointing to the north on streets going east and west. On streets going north and south, the blue area should be to

the east.

DON'T place the blue area over the right shoulder of the deceased when used to cover a casket. The flag should also never be lowered into a grave, or be in contact with the ground.

DO hoist the flag out with the blue area first when suspending it on a rope over a sidewalk.

DON'T carry the flag to the left when marching in a procession with other flags. The U.S. flag should be held to the right if being carried by itself. If among a line of other flags, the Star-Spangled Banner should be carried front and center.

Fixing Your Flag

Is your flag dirty or showing a small amount of wear and tear? That doesn't mean it has to be retired.

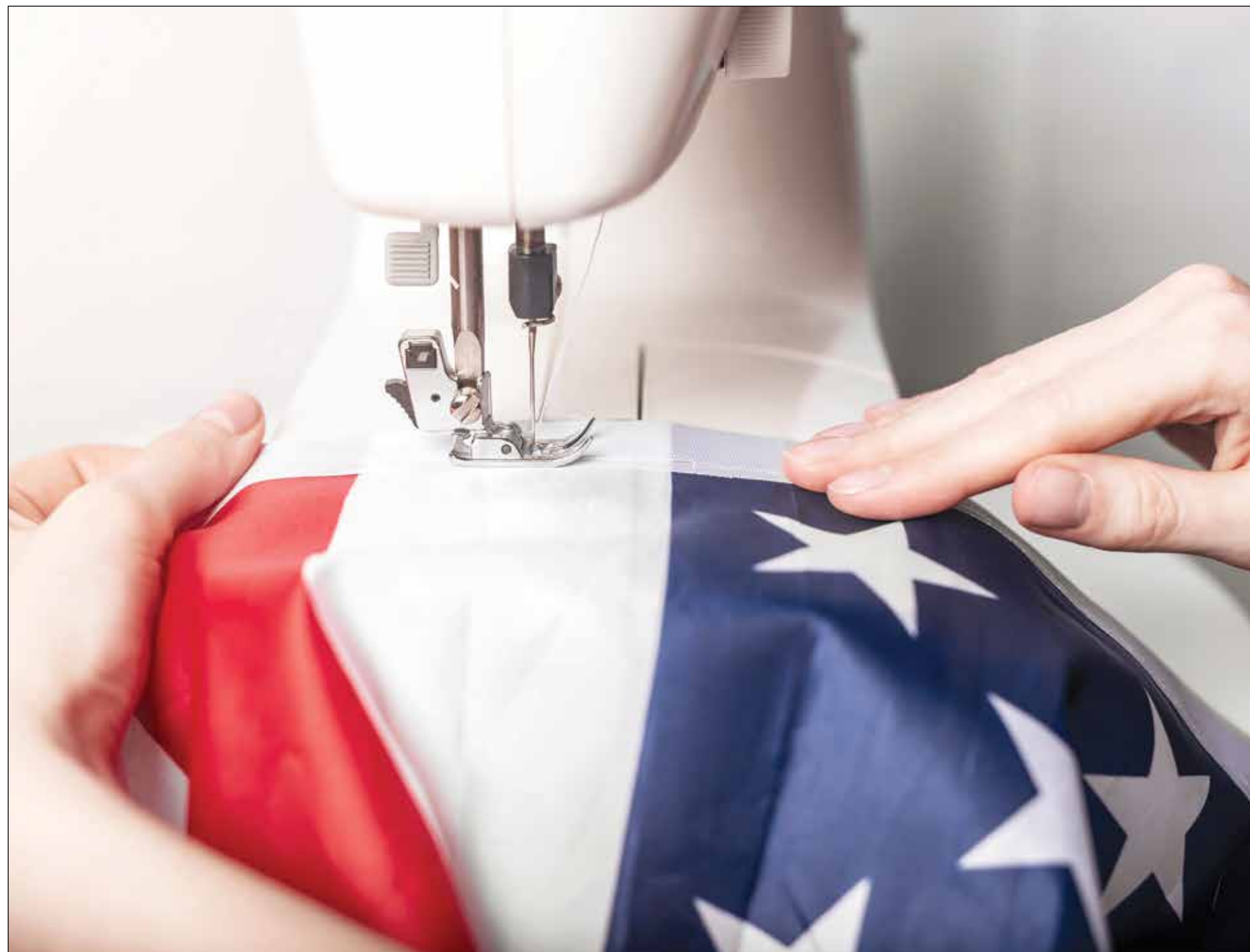
In fact, the Flag Code encourages us to mend or clean banners when necessary. Here's how.

WASHING AT HOME

Allowing your flag to touch the ground is a sign of disrespect, and it might also leave behind a nasty smudge. If that happens to you, address the situation immediately so you don't end up with a lasting mark on the banner. Always use cold water and a mild detergent, and wash it by hand. Once you've scrubbed away the grime, lay your flag flat to dry rather than hanging it up, since the material may stretch out of shape. You'll also lower the chances of any colors bleeding into one another.

CONSULT THE EXPERTS

Untreated dirt and grime can cause permanent stains. Higher-intensity winds might create a tear in the banner. If you're unsure how to correct these small defects, or just want to make sure that this historic symbol is treated with the utmost care, consider contacting a local dry cleaner. They'll have years of experience in handling delicate fabrics. If the experts provide additional instructions, follow



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them closely. Careful, consistent flag repairs and maintenance will greatly improve its appearance while also prolonging its life.

SEWING IT UP

Dirt, air pollutants, salt and debris aren't the only worries. Take regular opportunities to

closely inspect the banner for any holes or fraying caused by the flag's constant exposure to wind. If you employ an all-weather flag, it's particularly important to do these evaluations after big storms. Even very small imperfections can rapidly expand into major holes in bad weather condi-

tions. At the same time, frequent modifications can change the flag's shape and appearance — so always proceed with great caution.

A SHORT LIFESPAN

Unfortunately, none of this will keep your flag flying forever — in particular if you display

it rain or shine. Government estimates have placed the expected lifespan for the average cotton or nylon flag at about 90 days, based on daily display from dawn to dusk with no inclement weather. Flags flown 24 hours a day might last one fourth as long before they begin to fade and fray.

America's First Flag

The Continental Congress confirmed on June 14, 1777, that the U.S. flag would have 13 stripes alternating in red and white, with 13 stars arranged in a blue area to the upper left.

These represented the original states, including Connecticut, Delaware, Georgia, Massachusetts, Maryland, New Jersey, New Hampshire, New York, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina and Virginia.

Each color of the flag was chosen for a specific reason according to Charles Thomson, the secretary of the Continental Congress and an instrumental figure in creating the American seal: Red represented valor, blue stood for justice and perseverance, and white stood for purity. The original 13 stars were to be arranged in a circle such that no individual colony was arranged above another.

A group led by George Washington was said to have chosen Betsy Ross, a Philadelphia-based upholsterer, to fulfill the design instructions before the first flag was presented to Congress. No evidence of this folklore has been found in either Continental Congressional record or in Washington's diaries. But Ross



JEAN LEON GEROME FERRIS/WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

continued to make flags for more than five decades, many by government contract.

The flag was first carried into war on Sept. 11, 1777, in the Battle of the Brandywine, then initially flew over a foreign territory in 1778, after capture of a British fort in the Bahamas. In all, there have been 27 different versions of

the flag, as one or more states were ratified as members of the U.S.

Initially, both stars and stripes were added as additional states joined the union, resulting in a 15-stripe flag sewn by Mary Young Pickersgill that added Vermont and Kentucky in 1795. This flag, said to have

inspired Francis Scott Key to compose our National Anthem, now hangs in the Smithsonian.

Thereafter, the design reverted back to 13 stripes, with only stars added. The next update, from 1818, added five more stars to represent the new states of Mississippi, Indiana, Louisiana, Ohio and

Tennessee.

The flag was initially dubbed "Old Glory" in 1831 by a shipmaster from Salem, Massachusetts, named Capt. William Driver. At that point, the flag had 24 stars. The most recent update moved the flag from 49 to 50 stars in 1960 after Hawaii was granted statehood.

Flying in Weather or Darkness

Strictly speaking, the Flag Code dictates that the banner should only fly from sunrise until sunset.

Lowering the flag at nightfall was considered to be a sign of respect both to the symbol itself and to all of those who served under it. The worry, too, was that displaying the flag in inclement weather would lead to early degradation of the material.

But a subsequent loophole has since opened the door for 24-hour displays: Modern flag code makes allowances for new all-weather fabrics, with the added requirement that the flag be properly illuminated.

Look for a flag that boasts synthetic, nylon or other non-absorbent material meant to withstand extra-long usage in order to show your patriotism day or night. They should also have metal grommets, double-stitched hems and a sturdy edge.

Just remember that even flags that have been labeled as “all-weather” can be damaged by extreme conditions. Very high winds can strain the banner’s stitching and fibers, while heavy rain over a long period of time can make the flag too heavy and stretch the material.

Next, be ready to light the flagpole such that the banner is recognizable to casual passersby. There are a series of low-current lighting options, as well as affordable outdoor solar lighting, that are ideal for illuminating a flagpole. Floodlights and below-grade uplighting are also commonly employed.

Issues may arise if your residence or business is near an airport, depending on the lighting system in use. If it’s powerful enough, the lights may cause visual interference or a dangerous distraction within the plane’s approach pattern. Check with airport authorities.

In some cases, ambient lighting may be enough to satisfy the requirement. What happens if you don’t? Technically, the U.S. Flag Code is federal law, and it’s used as the foundation for a series of state laws regarding the display and handling of our official banner. The federal code doesn’t include penalties for infringement, but some state laws do.

Once you’ve met all these guidelines, it’s important to inspect, clean and repair your flag on a regular basis. Small tears can become unrepairable holes quite quickly. Don’t continue to fly your flag after it’s become tattered or worn out.



Why Flag Day Matters

There have been a number of claims to Flag Day's first official observance, but almost all of them took place more than a century after it was adopted as a national symbol. Here's a look back.

A PROUD MOMENT

Flag Day commemorates a resolution creating the banner signed on June 14, 1777, by the Second Continental Congress. Decades later, the day is celebrated by hanging the official banner, along with parades, picnics and family get-togethers, and local ceremonies sponsored by towns, patriotic organizations and veterans groups. In some cases, flags are saved for official retirement ceremonies held on this day, creating a humbling experience.

THE LONG JOURNEY

William T. Kerr is credited with starting the American Flag Day Association as a youngster in 1888 in Pittsburgh, Penn., and is now known colloquially as the Father of Flag Day. A school teacher from Wisconsin named Bernard Cigrand also spent years lobbying Congress to make June 14 a national holiday. President Woodrow Wilson issued a proclamation in 1916 urging the creation of Flag Day, as did President Calvin Coolidge



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in 1927. Congress didn't approve the national observance until 1949, however, and President Harry Truman then signed it into law.

SCHOOLS

Scattered Flag Day celebrations began in schools in the late 1800s. The initial purpose was reportedly to educate the growing number of immigrant

children on the banner's history. George Bolch, principal of a kindergarten program in New York City, held the first widely recognized patriotic ceremonies in 1889 to commemorate the signing of the initial flag resolution. The state's Department of Education subsequently declared that all schools should follow Bolch's lead. A legislative initiative to

include Flag Day among New York's officially observed holidays followed.

CITIES

The Society of Colonial Dames led an effort encouraging Philadelphia to pass a resolution in 1893 requiring the flag to be displayed in the city's public buildings. Elizabeth Gillespie, the organi-

zation's president, also pushed the city to declare June 14 as Flag Day. She was a direct descendant of Benjamin Franklin, but at that time such resolutions weren't given high priority as they originated from women. Pennsylvania eventually became the first state to make Flag Day a legal holiday on June 14, but that didn't happen until 1937.



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Be Part of Flag History

A number of historic flags have over flown over key moments in our nation's history, and you can still view them in person.

STAR-SPANGLED BANNER

Perhaps our nation's most famous flag, the Star-Spangled Banner served as inspiration for the National Anthem. Francis Scott Key wrote the song after he was captured during the War of 1812, and caught sight the banner above Fort Henry after the British had been repelled. The flag is now on display at the National Museum of American History in Washington, D.C. You can also visit the location in

Baltimore where he penned "The Star-Spangled Banner," now known as the Fort McHenry National Monument and Historic Shrine. The flagpole still stands where it did in 1814.

OLD GLORY

The original flag that Capt. William Driver of Salem, Massachusetts, dubbed "Old Glory" can also be seen the National Museum of American History in Washington, D.C. Driver took the flag on a number of at-sea trips around the world, before hoisting it above the Tennessee capitol building.

USS ARIZONA FLAG

The flag that flew over the USS Arizona when the Japanese bombed

Pearl Harbor is on display at the Arizona State Capitol Museum in Phoenix. Also on display are other artifacts from the day, which forced the United States into World War II.

IWO JIMA FLAG

Marines were unforgettably captured on film as they raised the American flag over Iwo Jima following an intense fight for Mount Suribachi during World War II. A statue fashioned after the image with an attached American flag now stands in Arlington as a memorial to the Marines who've given their lives in service of our country since 1775.

9/11 FLAG

Another iconic image found three

first responders raising the U.S. flag over the World Trade Center wreckage after the shocking attacks of Sept. 11, 2001. Thousands lost their lives that day as the world-famous twin towers fell. Lost for many years, the flag was found in 2016 and donated to New York City's 9/11 Museum and Memorial, where it can be viewed today.

APOLLO FLAGS

If you're lucky enough to hitch a ride on a future SpaceX flight to the moon, you might find one of the six American flags left on the lunar surface by our astronauts.

In the meantime, you can see a replica of the Apollo flags at Washington D.C.'s National Air and Space Museum.

How to Handle a Flag

Wondering what to do when a flag isn't majestically flying above you? Here's how to handle one.

FOLDING THE FLAG

Folding the flag into its familiar three-corner shape might take some practice, but soon you'll become part of a long history of honoring the banner. First, hold your flag lengthwise and fold it in half — then fold it in half lengthwise once more. Be sure the blue area is on the outside. Make a triangular fold from the other end, continuing until the flag is completely folded. Tuck the edge of the flag into the folds to ensure that only the blue field with white stars can be seen.

LOWERING THE FLAG

The Flag Code instructs us never to let a flag touch the ground. This is most often a risk as we lower the flag at dusk. Accidents happen, but extra care should be taken to ensure that this historic symbol is treated with proper respect. Keeping it away from dirt and grime will also lengthen the life of your banner. Should it fall to the ground, the Flag Code doesn't require that the flag be destroyed. It might require washing or dry cleaning, but can continue to be flown. Presidents or governors may also order the flag lowered to half-staff as a form of mourn-



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ing. There are set days in which flags are to be lowered, including Peace Officers Memorial Day on May 15, Memorial Day on the last Monday in May, Sept. 11, and National Pearl Harbor Remembrance Day on Dec. 7.

RETIRING THE FLAG

The Flag Code states that banners which have become torn or frayed should be retired, preferably by burning them. Exercise proper caution throughout the ceremony, and be aware of any local or state

fire codes that may be in place. Begin by folding your flag in the customary manner, while building a fire which has enough intensity to completely consume it. Salute as the flag is placed in the fire, reciting the Pledge of Allegiance and

then pausing for a moment of silence. The ashes of the flag should then be buried. If you're not comfortable holding the ceremony, contact your local American Legion post. Many of them conduct disposal ceremonies on Flag Day.