



*Honor The Past – Build The Future*

# The American Flag Foundation, Inc.

PO Box 435, Riderwood, MD 21139 ★ (410) 563-FLAG (3524) ★ Fax (410) 821-1252 ★ [www.americanflagfoundation.org](http://www.americanflagfoundation.org)

## Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) About the Flag

***Q: What days should the flag be displayed?***

A: The flag should be displayed on all days, especially on

New Year's Day - January 1

Inauguration Day - January 20

Martin Luther King Jr's Birthday - third Monday in January

Lincoln's Birthday - February 12

Washington's Birthday - third Monday in February

Easter Sunday - (variable)

Mother's Day - second Sunday in May

Armed Forces Day - third Saturday in May

Memorial Day (half-staff until noon) - May 30th & last Monday in May

Flag Day - June 14

Independence Day - July 4

Labor Day - first Monday - September 17

Columbus Day - second Monday in October

Navy Day - October 27

Veterans Day - November 11

Thanksgiving Day - fourth Thursday in November

Christmas Day - December 25

Other days as may be proclaimed by the President of the United States

Birthdays of States (date of admission)

State holidays

***Q: Can a flag that has been used to cover a casket be displayed after its original use?***

A: There are no provisions in the Flag Code to suggest otherwise. It would be a fitting tribute to the memory of the deceased veteran and their service to a grateful nation if their casket flag were displayed.

***Q: Can the United States flag be displayed on days when the weather is inclement?***

A: The flag should not be displayed on days when the weather is inclement, except when an all weather (nylon or other non-absorbent material) flag is displayed. However, most all flags are made of all weather materials. (Ref Flag Code 6(c))



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***Q: What is the significance of displaying the flag at half-staff?***

A: This gesture is a sign to indicate the nation mourns the death of an individual(s), such as death of the President or former President, Vice President, Supreme Court Justice, member of Congress, Secretary of an executive or military department, etc. Only the President of the United States or the Governor of the State may order the flag to be half-staffed. The honor and reverence accorded this solemn act is quickly becoming eroded by those individuals and agencies that display the flag at half-staff on inappropriate occasions without proper authority to do so. (ref: Flag Code 7(m))

***Q: When the flag is not flown from a staff, how should it be displayed?***

A: It should be displayed vertically, whether indoors or out, and suspended so that its folds fall free as though the flag were staffed. The stripes may be displayed either horizontally or vertically against a wall, the union should be uppermost and to the flag's own right; that is, to the observer's left. When displayed in a window of a home or a place of business, the flag should be displayed in the same way; that is, with the union or blue field to the left of the observer in the street. (Ref Flag Code 7(i))

***Q: How are unserviceable flags destroyed?***

A: The Flag Code suggests that, "when a flag has served its useful purpose, it should be destroyed, preferably by burning." For individual citizens, this should be done discreetly so the act of destruction is not perceived as a protest or desecration. Many American Legion Posts conduct Disposal of Unserviceable Flag Ceremonies on June 14, Flag Day. This ceremony creates a particularly dignified and solemn occasion for the retirement of unserviceable flags. (ref: Flag Code 8(k))

***Q: Can the flag be washed or dry-cleaned?***

A: Yes. There are no provisions of the Flag Code which prohibit such care. The decision to wash or dry-clean would be dependent on the material

***Q: Are you required to destroy the flag if it touches the ground?***

A: Flag Code section 176b states that the flag should not touch anything beneath it such as the ground. This is stated to indicate that care should be exercised in the handling of the flag, to protect it from becoming soiled or damaged. You ARE NOT required to destroy the flag when this happens. As long as the flag remains suitable for display, even if washing or dry-cleaning (which is acceptable practice) is required, you may continue to display the flag as a symbol of our great country. (ref: Flag Code 8(b))



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***Q: What is the proper method for folding the flag?***

A: The Flag Code does not require any specific method, however, there is a tradition that has developed over time. This method produces a triangular shaped form like that of a three corner hat with only the blue union showing. There is a diagram available on Folding the Flag that lists the steps involved.

***Q: May a person, other than a veteran, have their casket draped with the flag of the United States?***

A: Yes, although this honor is usually reserved for veterans or highly regarded state and national figures, the Flag Code does not prohibit this use.

***Q: What is meant by the flag's own right?***

A: The "right" as the position of honor developed from the time when the "right hand" was the "weapon hand" or "point of danger." The right hand, raised without a weapon, was a sign of peace. The right hand, to any observer, is the observer's left. Therefore, as used in the Flag Code, the flag and/or blue field is displayed to the left of the observer, which is the flag's "own right." (ref: Flag Code 7(d),(i))

***Q: Is it proper to fly the flag of the United States 24 hours a day?***

A: The Flag Code states it is the universal custom to display the flag only from sunrise to sunset on buildings and on stationary flag staffs in the open. However, when a patriotic effect is desired, the flag may be displayed twenty-four hours a day if properly illuminated during the hours of darkness. (ref: Flag Code 6(a)) The American Legion interprets "proper illumination" as a light specifically placed to illuminate the flag (preferred) or having a light source sufficient to illuminate the flag so it is recognizable as such by the casual observer.

***Q: What should be the position of the flag when displayed from a staff in a church, public auditorium or other public meeting place, whether indoors or outdoors, on platform, or on the floor at ground level?***

A: When used on a speaker's platform, the flag, if displayed flat, should be displayed above and behind the speaker. When displayed from a staff in a church, public auditorium or meeting place, the flag should hold the position of superior prominence, in advance of the audience, and in the position of honor at the clergyman's or speaker's right as he faces the audience. Prior to the Flag Code changes in 1976, the display procedure was somewhat different. Now the staffed flag should always be placed to the right of the speaker (observer's left) without regard to a platform or floor level. (ref: Flag Code 7 (k))

***Q: What are the penalties for the physical desecration of the flag?***

A: There are currently no penalties for the physical desecration of the flag. The American Legion and other members of the Citizens Flag Alliance continue working towards securing a Constitutional amendment to protect the flag from physical desecration.



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***Q: What do the colors and gold fringe on the American Flag mean?***

**A:** Sentimental writers and orators sometimes ascribe meanings to the colors in the flag. The practice is erroneous, as are statements on this subject attributed to George Washington and other founders of the country.

From the book "Our Flag" published in 1989 by the House of Representatives...

"On July 4, 1776, the Continental Congress passed a resolution authorizing a committee to devise a seal for the United States of America. This mission, designed to reflect the Founding Fathers' beliefs, values, and sovereignty of the new Nation, did not become a reality until June 20, 1782. In heraldic devices, such as seals, each element has a specific meaning. Even colors have specific meanings. The colors red, white, and blue did not have meanings for The Stars and Stripes when it was adopted in 1777.

However, the colors in the Great Seal did have specific meanings. Charles Thompson, Secretary of the Continental Congress, reporting to Congress on the Seal, stated: "The colors of the pales (the vertical stripes) are those used in the flag of the United States of America; White signifies purity and innocence, Red, hardiness & valour, and Blue, the color of the Chief (the broad band above the stripes) signifies vigilance, perseverance & justice."

Also this from a book about the flag published in 1977 by the House of Representatives...

"The star is a symbol of the heavens and the divine goal to which man has aspired from time immemorial; the stripe is symbolic of the rays of light emanating from the sun." The quote below concerning gold fringe on the Flag is from the book "So Proudly We Hail, The History of the United States Flag" Smithsonian Institute Press 1981, by William R. Furlong and Byron McCandless. "The placing of a fringe on Our Flag is optional with the person of organization, and no Act of Congress or Executive Order either prohibits the practice, according to the Institute of Heraldry. Fringe is used on indoor flags only, as fringe on flags on outdoor flags would deteriorate rapidly. The fringe on a Flag is considered and 'honorable enrichment only', and its official use by the US Army dates from 1895.. A 1925 Attorney General's Opinion states: 'the fringe does not appear to be regarded as an integral part of the Flag, and its presence cannot be said to constitute an unauthorized addition to the design prescribed by statute. An external fringe is to be distinguished from letters, words, or emblematic designs printed or superimposed upon the body of the flag itself. Under law, such additions might be open to objection as unauthorized; but the same is not necessarily true of the fringe.'"

The gold trim is generally used on ceremonial indoor flags that are used for special services and is believed to have been first used in a military setting. It has no specific significance that I have ever run across, and its (gold trim) use is in compliance with applicable flag codes and laws. .



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***Q: Where does the flag fly 24 hours a day?***

**A:** After the addition of the new House and Senate wings in the 1850s, even before the great dome was completed in 1863, photographs of the period show flags flying over each new wing and the central east and west fronts.

The custom of flying the flags 24 hours a day over the east and west fronts was begun during World War 1. This was done in response to requests received from all over the country urging that the flag of the United States be flown continuously over the public buildings in Washington, DC.

- Presidential proclamations and laws since that time authorize the display of the flag 24 hours a day at the following places:
- Fort McHenry National Monument and Historic Shrine, Baltimore, Maryland (Presidential Proclamation No.2795, July 2, 1948).
- Flag House Square, Albemarle and Pratt Streets, Baltimore Maryland (Public Law 83-319, approved March 26, 1954).
- United States Marine Corp Memorial (Iwo Jima), Arlington, Virginia (Presidential Proclamation No.3418, June 12, 1961).
- On the Green of the Town of Lexington, Massachusetts (Public Law 89-335, approved November 8, 1965).
- The White House, Washington, DC. (Presidential Proclamation No.4000, September 4,1970).  
Washington Monument, Washington, DC. (Presidential Proclamation No.4064, July 6,1971, effective July 4, 1971). Fifty flags of the United States are displayed at the Washington Monument continuously.
- United States Customs Ports of Entry which are continually open (Presidential Proclamation No.4131, May 5, 1972).
- Grounds of the National Memorial Arch in Valley Forge State Park, Valley Forge, Pennsylvania (Public Law 94-53, approved July 4, 1975).
- Many other places fly the flag at night as a patriotic gesture by custom.



***Q: Why is the Flag raised to full staff at noon on Memorial Day? This is the only occasion that the Flag is not flown at half staff all day. What is the authority for this?***

**A:** On Memorial Day, the last Monday in May, the Flag is displayed at half-staff from sunrise until noon and at full staff from noon until sunset; for the Nation lives and the Flag is the symbol of the living Nation. The authority is derived from The Flag Code, Title 36, U.S.C., Chapter 10, As amended by P.L. 344, 94<sup>th</sup> Congress, Approved July 7, 1976; § 175. Position and manner of display, Section (m).