

Flag Etiquette

The fundamental rule of flag etiquette is to treat all flags with respect and common sense.

The Stars and Stripes takes precedence over all other flags when flown within the United States. It should never be flown lower than another flag nor should it be smaller than another flag flown with it. Other flags may be flown at the same height and be the same size. Other national flags should not be smaller or flown lower than the Stars and Stripes when displayed together. If it is not possible to display two or more national flags of the same height, then they should not be displayed together.

The point of honor is on the extreme left from the standpoint of the observer (the flag's right). In a public gathering (lecture hall, church etc.) the Stars and Stripes should be on the right of the speakers or on the wall behind them. The order from left to right of flags flown together is the Stars and Stripes, other national flags in alphabetical order, state flags, county and city flags, organizational flags, personal flags.

If one flag is flown at half-staff for mourning, all other flags should also be flown at half-staff. The proper way to do this is to first raise the flags to their peaks and then lower them to half-staff. The Stars and Stripes is always the first to be raised and the last to be lowered.

It is permissible to fly the Stars and Stripes at night, but only if it is illuminated in a dignified manner. No flag should be flown during terrible weather that might damage it based on a common-sense interpretation of circumstances. When a flag is torn, it should be repaired, and if soiled, one should refer to the manufacturer's instructions for cleaning.

When a flag no longer looks nice and it cannot be repaired or cleaned, it should be destroyed in a dignified manner by either burning it or placing it in a sealed bag or box before being sent out for trash collection. The American Legion in most areas collects U.S. Flags when they are ready for disposal. They will accept possession of the flag as well as to ensure that it is destroyed appropriately.

The canton of the flag (the blue field with the 50 stars) should be to the observer's left except:

1. When displayed on a casket,
2. When displayed as a decal on the right side of a vehicle (bus, truck, plane, etc.)
3. When worn as a patch on the right arm (but use on the left arm is preferable).

The Stars and Stripes should be in the center of a group of flags only when:

1. The center pole is taller than the others or
2. When a fan-like arrangement makes the center pole higher than the others.

It is always preferable to fly or display an organizational flag along with the Stars and Stripes at the same time. A salute (hand over heart for those not in uniform) should be rendered when the US flag is raised, lowered, or carried by on parade, when the Pledge of Allegiance is recited, and when the national anthem is played unless the flag is not present. A new law was passed by Congress in 2007 allows honorably discharged military service veterans to render a hand salute if they wish.

Pledge - During the pledge to the U.S. flag, those present in uniform should render the military salute. Those who are not in uniform should place the right hand over the heart.