

# Flag Protocol and Ceremonies





# Table of Contents

## Program Overview

History of the American Flag.....	3
The Pledge of Allegiance .....	4
American Flag Etiquette .....	4
Flag Ceremonies .....	7-13
Flag Folding .....	14
Flag Folding Ceremony .....	15
Flag Retirement Ceremonies .....	17-22



*For additional information on flag protocol and etiquette visit [www.usa.gov/flag](http://www.usa.gov/flag).*



# History of the American Flag

*For more than 200 years, the American flag has been the symbol of our nation's strength and unity. It's been a source of pride and inspiration for millions of citizens. And it has been a prominent icon in our national history. Here are the highlights of its unique past.*

On January 1, 1776, the Continental Army was reorganized in accordance with a Congressional resolution which placed American forces under George Washington's control. On that New Year's Day the Continental Army was laying siege to Boston, which had been taken over by the British Army. Washington ordered the Grand Union flag hoisted above his base at Prospect Hill. It had 13 alternate red and white stripes and the British Union Jack in the upper left-hand corner (the canton).

In May of 1776, Betsy Ross reported that she sewed the first American flag.

On June 14, 1777 in order to establish an official flag for the new nation, the Continental Congress passed the first Flag Act: "Resolved, That the flag of the United States be made of thirteen stripes, alternate red and white; that the union be thirteen stars, white in a blue field representing a new Constellation."



1775-1777



1777



Between 1777 and 1960, Congress passed several acts that changed the shape, design, and arrangement of the flag and allowed for additional stars and stripes to be added to reflect the admission of each new state.

- Act of January 13, 1794 – provided for 15 stripes and 15 stars after May 1795.
- Act of April 4, 1818 – provided for 13 stripes and one star for each state, to be added to the flag on the 4th of July following the admission of each new state, signed by President James Monroe.
- Executive Order of President William Taft dated June 24, 1912 – established proportions of the flag and provided for arrangement of the stars in six horizontal rows of eight each, a single point of each star to be upward.
- Executive Order of President Dwight Eisenhower dated January 3, 1959 – provided for the arrangement of the stars in seven rows of seven stars each, staggered horizontally and vertically.
- Executive Order of President Dwight Eisenhower dated August 21, 1959 – provided for the arrangement of the stars in nine rows of stars staggered horizontally and eleven rows of stars staggered vertically.

Today the flag consists of 13 horizontal stripes, 7 red alternating with 6 white. The stripes represent the original 13 colonies; the stars represent the 50 states of the Union. The colors of the flag are symbolic as well: Red symbolizes Hardiness and Valor, White symbolizes Purity and Innocence and Blue represents Vigilance, Perseverance and Justice.



# 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."*

Francis Bellamy, the author of these words, was an ordained minister, magazine writer, and Freemason, who stated that his aim was to say "what our republic meant and what was the underlying spirit of its life." Bellamy wrote the Pledge of Allegiance in 1892 as part of the 400th anniversary of the discovery of America by Christopher Columbus. It was embraced by the nation and almost immediately became a part of the school-day ritual. Bellamy's original text has been altered twice. In 1923, the words "the flag of the United States of America" were substituted for the words "my flag". Congress officially recognized the Pledge in 1942 and added the words "under God" in 1954.

## American Flag Etiquette

Federal law stipulates many aspects of flag etiquette. The section of law dealing with American Flag etiquette is generally referred to as the Flag Code. Some general guidelines from the Flag Code answer many of the most common questions:

- The flag should be lighted at all times, either by sunlight or by an appropriate light source.
- The flag should be flown in fair weather, unless the flag is designed for inclement weather use.
- The flag should never be dipped to any person or thing. It is flown upside down only as a distress signal.
- The flag should not be used for any decoration in general. Bunting of blue, white, and red stripes is available for these purposes. The blue stripe of the bunting should be on the top.
- The flag should never be used for any advertising purpose. It should not be embroidered, printed or otherwise impressed on such articles as cushions, handkerchiefs, napkins, boxes, or anything intended to be discarded after temporary use. Advertising signs should not be attached to the staff or halyard.
- The flag should not be used as part of a costume or athletic uniform, except that a flag patch may be used on the uniform of military, fire and police personnel, and members of patriotic organizations.
- The flag should never have any mark, insignia, letter, word, number, figure, or drawing of any kind placed on it, or attached to it.
- The flag should never be used for receiving, holding, carrying, or delivering anything.
- When the flag is lowered, no part of it should touch the ground or any other object; it should be received by waiting hands and arms. To store the flag it should be folded neatly and ceremoniously.
- The flag should be cleaned and mended when necessary.
- When a flag is so worn it is no longer fit to serve as a symbol of our country, it should be destroyed by burning in a dignified manner.



# American Flag Display Rules

## DISPLAY OUTDOORS



### Over the Middle of the Street

It should be suspended vertically with the union to the north in an east and west street or to the east in a north and south street.



### Flown at Half-staff

Should be first hoisted to the peak for an instant and then lowered to the half-staff position. The flag should be again raised to the peak before it is lowered for the day. "Half-staff" is the lowering of the flag to one-half the distance between the top and bottom of the staff. Crepe streamers may be affixed to spear heads or flagstaffs in a parade only by the order of the President of the United States.



### Flown on the Same Halyard with Non-Nation Flags

The American Flag should always be at the peak. When the flags are flown from adjacent staffs, the flag of the United States should be hoisted first and lowered last. No such flag or pennant may be placed above the flag of the United States or to the right of the flag of the United States.



### Suspended Over a Sidewalk

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



### From a Staff Projecting Horizontally or at an Angle

The flag may be projected from the window sill, balcony, or front of a building, with the union flag placed at the peak of the staff unless the flag is at half-staff.



### In a Parade with Other Flags

The flag, when carried in a procession with another flag, or flags, should be either on the marching right; that is, the flag's own right, or, if there is a line of other flags, in front of the center of that line.





### With Non-National Flags

When flags of two or more nations are displayed, they are to be flown from separate staffs of the same height. The flags should be approximately equal size. International usage forbids the display of the flag of one nation above that of another nation in time of peace.



### With Other National Flags

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### With Another Flag Against a Wall from Crossed Staffs

Should be on the right, the flag's own right which is the viewer's left, and its staff should be in front of the staff of the other flag.



### When the flag is displayed on a car

The staff shall be fixed to the chassis or clamped to the right fender.

## **DISPLAY INDOORS**



### From a Staff in a Church or Public Auditorium on or off a Podium

The flag of the United States of America 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. Any other flag so displayed should be placed on the left of the clergyman or speaker (to the right of the audience).



### Used to Cover a Casket

It should be so placed that the union is at the head and over the left shoulder. The flag should not be lowered into the grave or allowed to touch the ground.



### When displayed in a window

It should be displayed with the union or blue field to the left of the observer in the street. When festoons, rosettes or drapings are desired, bunting of blue, white and red should be used, but never the flag.



### Other than being Flown from a Staff

The flag should be displayed flat, whether indoors or out. When 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.

# Flag Ceremonies

## Honoring the American Flag

The American Flag has been known as “Old Glory,” “the Stars and Stripes,” and “the colors.” For American citizens, the flag is a powerful symbol of liberty and equal opportunity for all. While flags of other countries often represent a glorious past or are a symbol of a royal family, the American flag carries the message of national independence and unity for people originally from many diverse countries. George Washington stated that the stars are from heaven represented by blue and the red represents Britain. Each star represents a state, and the white stripes stand for the liberty of each original colony from Britain.

Flag ceremonies are very often part of larger ceremonies. They are also used to open or to close a troop/group meeting. Learning about the proper way to handle the American flag and to conduct flag ceremonies fosters a patriotic spirit in young people.

At a flag ceremony, you say the Pledge of Allegiance in the presence of a flag. You may also sing a patriotic song and repeat the Girl Scout Promise and Law.

## Salute the Flag

To salute the flag, stand at attention and place your right hand over your heart. Salute the flag when it is being raised or lowered, passes you in a parade, and reciting the Pledge of Allegiance. Salute when you sing “The Star-Spangled Banner,” with or without the flag present.

There is absolute silence from the time the flag ceremony begins until dismissed. The Color Guard remains silent from the time they start to walk in until they walk out. The Color Guard does not speak or sing with the group, but stays at attention.

Color Guards and the Girl Scout in charge (caller) may wear white gloves. Red sashes can be worn by Color Guards around their waist, right to left, tie on left. Red sashes worn by flag bearers are worn over the shoulder, right to left, tie on left at waist.

A flag ceremony is a way of showing love and respect for one’s country. Flag ceremonies may be used for:

- Opening or closing meetings.
- Opening or closing special events.
- Beginning or closing a day.
- Honoring a special occasion or special person.
- Retiring a worn flag.

Flag ceremonies may take place in meeting rooms, in outdoor settings, in large auditoriums, on stage, even on horseback. All flag ceremonies share one thing in common – respect for the flag.



## Flag Ceremony and Guidelines

Keep it simple. Emphasis should be on respect for the flag rather than on the commands or techniques. Ask these questions when planning:

1. Who will carry the flag?
2. Who will be the Color Guards?
3. Who will give the directions for the ceremony?
4. What song will be sung? Who will sound the pitch and start the song?
5. Will a poem or quotation be included? Who will say or read it?
6. After the Pledge of Allegiance, will the Promise and the Law be said?
7. In what order will the parts of the ceremony take place?
8. When will the group practice?
9. Where will the flags be placed at the end of the ceremony?

## Terms Used in a Flag Ceremony

The **color bearer** (or flag bearer) is the person who carries the flag. There is one color bearer for each flag used in the ceremony.

The **color guard** is a team that guards the flags. Any even number of guards may be used, but usually four or six girls are sufficient.

The **Girl Scout in charge** (or caller) is a designated Girl Scout who announces or calls each part of the ceremony.

The **standards** are the stands that support the flag. The color bearers place their flags in the standards.





## Basic Flag Ceremony Commands

### Opening Flag Ceremony

**Girl Scouts, Attention** – This signals everyone to stand.

**Color Guard, Advance** – This signals the color guard to advance with the flags.

#### Color Guard, Post the Colors

**Indoors** – The Color Guard places the flags in the stands, the American Flag last. (Do not forget the American Flag is always on its own right, this would mean if you stand where the American Flag is going to be posted, facing the audience, and you are the rightmost flag).

**Outdoors** – The Flag Bearer attaches the flag to the rope and quickly hoist the flag; the American flag is raised first.

**Color Guard, Honor your Colors** – The Color Guard salutes the Flag and then returns to attention. The Pledge of Allegiance, songs, poems, Girl Scout Promise is done now.

**Please join me in the Pledge of Allegiance. . .**

**Please join me in the Girl Scout Promise. . .**

**Color Guard Dismissed** – The Color Guard walks to the back of the room or away from flagpole.

### Closing Flag Ceremony

**Girl Scouts, Attention** – This signals everyone to stand.

**Color Guard, Advance** – This signals the color bearers and guards to advance to the flags.

**Color Guard, Honor your Colors** – The Color Guard salutes the Flag and then returns to attention.

#### Color Guard, Retrieve the Colors

**Indoors** – The Color Guard removes the flags in the stands, the American Flag first.

**Outdoors** – The Flag Bearer lowers the flag slowly and with dignity. The Color Bearers fold the flag(s).

**Color Guard Dismissed** – The Color Guard carries the flag to the back of the room or carries the folded flag to an appropriate place.

**Other than saluting the flag immediately after posting, or before retrieving, the Color Guard remains at attention. They do not take part in any singing or speaking.**



## Point of Silence Ceremony

At your next outdoor event, try having participants walk through a “point of silence.” Position two Girl Scouts at the entrance to the field or parade ground.

These Girl Scouts should stand tall and quiet with the Girl Scout sign held up.

All the participants pass through the “point” walking in an orderly fashion. Once participants pass the “point” there is no talking or noise making allowed.

Participants leave through the point at the end of the ceremony with talking allowed once they are out of the point.

## Multiple Level Ceremony



**Opening:** Quiet Sign

*Girl Scout Daisy enters carrying a Girl Scout Daisy Flag.*

**Narrator 1:** I am the Girl Scout Daisy Flag. I have watched over the Girl Scouts in blue. I have watched them become Girl Scouts and now they seek the wise old owl.

*Girl Scout Brownie enters carrying a Girl Scout Brownie Flag.*

**Narrator 2:** I am the Girl Scout Brownie Flag. I have watched over the Girl Scouts in brown. I have guided their enthusiasm for two years and now they fly from my arms.

*Girl Scout Junior enters carry a Girl Scout Flag.*

**Narrator 3:** I am the Girl Scout Flag. I have watched over the Girl Scouts in green. For three years I have watched them go and now they step upward to Girl Scout Cadettes.

*Girl Scout Cadette enters carrying the World Association Flag.*

**Narrator 4:** I am the World Association Flag. I watch over my Girl Scouts to appreciate Girl Scouting and Girl Guiding all over the world. They have the same international spirit that made me great. I watch Girl Scout Cadettes grow to be Girl Scout Seniors. Please stand.

*Girl Scout Senior or Ambassador enters carrying the United States Flag.*

**Narrator 5:** I am the United States Flag. I watch over the Girl Scout Seniors and Ambassadors and all Girl Scouts. I can hold my head high when I am with them. I am proud of my daughters. Girl Scouts and guests – the flag of our country. Please join me in saying the Pledge of Allegiance.

Close as you like.



## Unfolding the Flag Ceremony

For this ceremony, it is suggested that you begin with the basic flag ceremony up until “Color Guards, Honor your Flag.” After a hand over the heart salute from the Color Guards, have the Color Guards move to the side and ask the audience to sit for the next portion of the ceremony.

**Have 5 girls standing in front of the audience, side by side.**

*Girl 1, who is on the left holds a correctly folded flag.*

**Girl 1:** I hold in my hands a folded flag – a piece of cloth – for presentation

*Girl 1 holds onto the grommet edge of the flag and begins to unfold the flag SLOWLY, passing the rest of the folded flag to the next girl in line. Only the blue union with the stars should be showing.*

**Girl 2:** I bring to this piece of cloth the color blue. Blue is the color of the sky and the oceans, whose mysteries remind us of a law that goes beyond the law of Man. Blue symbolizes justice.

*Girl 2 now unfolds another portion of the flag so Girl #3 may take hold, while Girl #1 and Girl 2 continue their hold on the flag. Girl #3 unfolds until a portion of the stripes are now visible.*

**Girl 3:** I bring to this piece of cloth the color white. White is the color of bridal gowns and Angel wings. White symbolizes purity.

*Girl 3 now unfolds the flag so Girl #4 may take hold. Girl #4 may unfold another fold.*

**Girl 4:** I bring to this cloth the color red. Red is the color of the blood of Americans who died for their country. Red symbolizes valor.

*Girl 4 passes the folded portion to Girl #5. Girl #5 finishes unfolding the flag.*

**Girl 5:** I hold in my hands, not a mere piece of cloth, but a symbol of valor, of purity, and of justice.

*All girls should take hold of the top of the flag and raise it so the lengthwise fold will open.*

**All girls together:** We hold in our hands the flag of the United States of America.  
Will the audience please rise and join in the Pledge of Allegiance.

From here, continue the ceremony. Have the Color Guards walk out with the 5 girls and unfurled flag to a back area where the flag may be refolded. If a flag on a flag pole was not used to walk in before the ceremony, this flag may be appropriately hung for the meeting.





# Flashlight Flag Ceremony

**Supplies needed:**

- Four flashlights
- American Flag

*Color Guard advances with flag and posts the colors. Lights are turned out so that the room is in total darkness. Flashlight bearers turn on flashlights and direct light toward the flag.*

**Narrator:** What you see here tonight represents the past, present, and future. The stripes of Old Glory stand for the original thirteen colonies. The stars represent the present 50 states. The light and warmth of the four lights you see shining remind us of the four great freedoms; Freedom of the Press, Freedom of Assembly; Freedom of Speech; and Freedom of Religion. Eliminate any one of these freedoms and our world would become darker and colder.

*As each freedom is called a flashlight is turned off until the room is again in total darkness.*

**Narrator:** Freedom of the Press

**Narrator:** Freedom of Assembly

**Narrator:** Freedom of Speech

**Narrator:** Freedom of Religion

**Narrator:** In this world of potential cold and darkness, of rule by a few, stands the United States of America. Here the Four Freedoms do exist and are an example of warmth and light for all. Will you please join us in the salute to our flag?

*Turn the flashlights back on and direct light toward the flag.*

*All join in the Pledge of Allegiance.*



## Flag Replacement Ceremony

This ceremony should be done at a school assembly with the principal in attendance.

### Supplies needed

- Tattered flag
- New flag (one that's been flown over the nation's Capitol)
- Certificate

*Girl Scouts and Leaders advance to the stage. Two Girl Scouts are holding the old flag draped over their arms (folded lengthwise). One Girl Scout has the new flag and another Girl Scout has the framed certificate. Four to six additional Girl Scouts also march up to the stage to fold the flag later.*

**Leader:** (to the school and principal) – Our flag is the symbol of our country. Have you ever stopped to think what the flag really means? As you look at your flag, remember that it is red because of the blood of the men and women who have died to keep our country free. It is blue because of the true blue loyalty of its defenders and people. It is white to symbolize liberty – our land of the free. And the stars are symbols of our states, and our hope for a bright and shining future.

**Leader:** (ask the principal to come forward)

*Girl Scouts bring old flag to the front.*

**Leader:** We have an old friend here who has fulfilled their duty to our country. The flag which has proudly waved in front of (name of community or school) for many years is now worn and faded, and we are here to retire it with honor. Please rise and be respectful as the Girl Scouts fold this flag for the last time.

*Girl Scouts fold the flag.*

*Music teacher leads the school in “My Country ‘tis of Thee.”*

*One Girl Scout holds the folded flag as the Color Guard steps back.*

**Leader:** This proud symbol of our country will be retired officially by our Girl Scouts at a later date.

*Girl Scouts bring forward new folded flag and framed certificate.*

**Leader:** Congress has decreed that the American Flag fly over each school. I am honored to present to you and the citizens of (name of community or school), a new flag. This flag is very special. It has been flown over the Capitol Building in Washington D.C. in honor of (name of community or school), as a symbol of the loyalty and faith in the United States of America. My hope is that it will now fly proudly over (name of community or school), and that all of our students, teachers, and parents will remember the meaning of our flag each time that they pass by.

**Leader:** (to the principal) Please accept your new flag and fly it high and well, with respect and honor.

*Music teacher leads school in the Star Spangled Banner while the Color Guard retreats.*



# Flag Folding

As a military custom, the flag is lowered daily at the last note of retreat. Special care should be taken that no part of the flag touches the ground. The Flag is then carefully folded into the shape of a tri-cornered hat, emblematic of the hats worn by colonial soldiers during the Independence War. In the folding, the red and white stripes are finally wrapped into the blue, as the light of day vanishes into the darkness of night.



## Step 1

To properly fold the Flag, begin by holding it waist-high with another person so that its surface is parallel to the ground.



## Step 2

Fold the lower half of the stripe section lengthwise over the field of stars, holding the bottom and top edges securely.



## Step 3

Fold the flag again lengthwise with the blue field on the outside.



## Step 4

Make a triangular fold by bringing the striped corner of the folded edge to meet the open (top) edge of the flag.



## Step 5

Turn the outer (end) point inward, parallel to the open edge, to form a second triangle.



## Step 6

The triangular folding is continued until the entire length of the flag is folded in this manner.



## Step 7

When the flag is completely folded, only a triangular blue field of stars should be visible.



## Flag Folding Ceremony

The flag folding ceremony described by the Uniformed Services is a dramatic and uplifting way to honor the flag on special days, like Memorial Day or Veterans Day, and is sometimes used at retirement ceremonies.

*Begin reading as the Color Guard or Flag Detail is coming forward.*

The flag folding ceremony represents the same religious principles on which our country was originally founded. The portion of the flag denoting honor is the canton of blue containing the stars representing the states our veterans served in uniform. The canton field of blue dresses from left to right and is inverted when draped as a pall on a casket of a veteran who has served our country in uniform.

In the Armed Forces of the United States, at the ceremony of retreat, the flag is lowered, folded in a triangle fold and kept under watch throughout the night as a tribute to our nation's honored dead. The next morning it is brought out and, at the ceremony of reveille, run aloft as a symbol of our belief in the resurrection of the body.

*Wait for the Color Guard to unravel and fold the flag into a quarter fold – resume reading when the Color Guard is standing ready.*

**The first fold** of our flag is a symbol of life.

**The second fold** is a symbol of our belief in the eternal life.

**The third fold** is made in honor and remembrance of the veteran departing our ranks who gave a portion of life for the defense of our country to attain a peace throughout the world.

**The fourth fold** represents our weaker nature, for as American citizens trusting in God, it is to Him we turn in times of peace as well as in times of war for His divine guidance.

**The fifth fold** is a tribute to our country, for the words of Stephen Decatur, "Our country, in dealing with other countries, may she always be right; but it is still our country, right or wrong."

**The sixth fold** is for where our hearts lie. It is with our heart that we 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.

**The seventh fold** is a tribute to our Armed Forces, for it is through the Armed Forces that we protect our country and our flag against all her enemies, whether they be found within or without the boundaries of our republic.

**The eighth fold** is a tribute to the one who entered in to the valley of the shadow of death, that we might see the light of day, and to honor mother, for whom it flies on mother's day.

**The ninth fold** is a tribute to womanhood; for it has been through their faith, love, loyalty and devotion that the character of the men and women who have made this country great have been molded.



**The tenth fold** is a tribute to father, for he, too, has given his sons and daughters for the defense of our country since they were first born.

**The eleventh fold**, in the eyes of a Hebrew citizen, represents the lower portion of the seal of King David and King Solomon, and glories, in their eyes, the God of Abraham, Issac, and Jacob.

**The twelfth fold**, in the eyes of a Christian citizen, represents an emblem of eternity and glories, in their eyes, God the Father, Son and Holy Ghost.

When the flag is completely folded, the stars are uppermost, reminding us of our national motto, “In God we Trust.”

*Wait for the Color Guard to inspect the flag. After the inspection, resume reading.*

After the flag is completely folded and tucked in, it takes on the appearance of a cocked hat, ever reminding us of the soldiers who served under General George Washington and the sailors and marines who served under Captain John Paul Jones who were followed by their comrades and shipmates in the Armed Forces of the United States, preserving for us the rights, privileges, and freedoms we enjoy today.

The Flag Folding Ceremony is from the U.S. Air Force Academy.



# Flag Retirement Ceremonies

## Retiring a Worn American Flag

Retiring an American Flag is a special ceremony that ends with burning the flag and disposing of the ashes in a respectful manner.

## Which is Really the Correct Way?

The subject of flag retirement ceremonies sparks heated debates every year in Girl Scouting circles. Like discussions of religion and politics, the flag and flag retirements evoke strong feelings in a lot of people. Many are willing to tell you that their way is the only way. So who's to say which elements of flag retirement ceremonies are correct and which are not? Who is the "authority" on flag retirements?

As Girl Scouts we are bound by the authority of U. S. Flag Code. Regarding flag retirement, U. S. Flag Code simply reads; "The flag, when it is in such condition that it is no longer a fitting emblem for display, should be destroyed in a dignified way, preferably by burning."

This simple statement being the only official guideline, many misconceptions are revealed.

### Common Misconceptions

Many well intended and patriotic people have deep seated ideas about how flag retirements are suppose to be done. Most of their ideas make wonderful flag retirement ceremonies, but are not necessarily fact when it comes to what MUST be done. Again, the simple statements of the

U. S. Flag Code are the only rules we must follow. That said, the following common misconceptions are disproved.

## Misconceptions

- **The flag must be cut up before retiring.**

The Flag Code does not say anything about cutting up the flag. The only conclusion that can be drawn then is – you may cut or not cut the flag as long as the flag is retired in a "dignified" manner.

- **If the flag is cut, it must be done with scissors, not ripped or cut with a knife.**

If this is your custom, it is great that you have such respect that you have developed specific customs for flag retirements. Be aware that others may have a custom that says the flag should only be ripped, not cut. Also know that there are a number of very patriotic people who feel that cutting or ripping the flag in any manner is a desecration of the flag and they will be biting their tongues hard as you do so. (If you do cut the flag, perhaps you may want to consider doing this prior to the ceremony in consideration of those who might find this part traumatic.)





- **Only certain organizations are authorized to retire flags.**

A number of people believe that only veteran organizations, military organizations, and Scouting organizations can or should retire flags. However, any organization or individual may retire a flag in a ceremony or in their backyard by themselves. Common sense may tell you that if you do it by yourself, that maybe you should do it in private so others who happen to see do not mistake your dignified service for unpatriotic desecration.

- **Flag retirements should only be done in a ceremony, only on a separate campfire, the fire should not be used for anything else, the ashes should be buried, etc.**

All of these, when explained to others, are good ways to demonstrate your own customs and your respect of our flag. However, they are just that, your customs. There are many different flag retirement ceremonies with differing elements in each. Generally, groups and organizations evolve and refine what makes their customs feel patriotic, respectful, and dignified.

- **Only people over 18 may handle the flag during flag retirement ceremonies.**

Not true.

- **The flag must be retired by burning.**

The flag code says “PREFERABLY by burning,” meaning that burying or other methods may be utilized when burning is not feasible.

### **Pass along your traditions, but teach respect too!**

As we see, the U. S. Flag Code allows just about any type of flag retirement ceremony. That does not mean we cannot have our traditions. Teach your traditions to your girls, and tell them why they are important to you and your troop. Tell your audience, “this is our custom, and other groups may have different customs.” It is important to talk to girls about what happens during a flag retirement before you start. Many will be witnessing a flag retirement for the first time and, if it is not explained, they may feel that something very wrong is going on.

The key is respect. Respect for our flag, and our country. Respect for others. There are many different flag retirement ceremonies you can conduct, and you could certainly design a ceremony yourself. The only requirement is that you conduct the ceremony in a “dignified” manner. Do this, and most people will be sincerely moved.

### **Know your audience**

If your Service Area is working with any other organizations to perform a flag retirement ceremony, find out what their customs are. If their members make up most of your audience for an event, then you should probably consider using their customs to honor them.

## **Retiring a Worn American Flag**

**Note:** Only one flag, representing all those to be destroyed, should be used in the ceremony.

Two Color Guards should be used at evening retreat, one for the flag currently in use and a special Color Guard for the flag to be permanently retired.

Just before sunset, the flag which has been flying all day is retired in the normal, ceremonial procedure for the group or site.

The Color Guard responsible for the flag receiving the final tribute moves front and center. The leader should present this Color Guard with the flag, which has been selected for its final tribute and subsequent destruction. The leader should instruct the Color Guard to “hoist the colors.”



Slowly and ceremoniously, the flag is lowered, and then respectfully folded in the customary triangle. The flag is delivered to the leader.

**Leader:** Girl Scouts dismissed.

## Ceremonial Burning

**Note:** Fire and flag preparation – the burning of a flag should take place at a campfire in a ceremony separate from the “Ceremony of Final Tribute.” The fire must be sizeable (preferably having burned down to a bed of red hot coals to avoid having bits of the flag being carried off by a roaring fire), yet be of sufficient intensity to ensure complete burning.

Before the ceremony begins, the Color Guard assigned to the flag opens up its tri-corner fold and then refolds it in a coffin-shaped rectangle.

When all is ready, assemble around the fire.

**Leader:** Girl Scouts attention, Color Guard attention, Color Guard advance. (The Color Guard comes forward and places the flag on the fire. All briskly salute).

**Leader:** Please join me in the singing of the “God Bless America.

**Leader:** (Give a message of the flag’s meaning).

**Leader:** Please join me in the “Pledge of Allegiance.”

(Or the Girl Scouts could perform a reading about the flag, recite the “American’s Creed,” etc.)

**Leader:** Girl Scouts dismissed. (They should be led out in single file and in silence).

The leader and Color Guard should remain to ensure that the flag is completely consumed and to burn additional flags, if any.

The fire should then be safely extinguished



## Flag Retirement Ceremony

When the U.S. flag becomes tattered or worn, it should be disposed of by burning. Here are the basics for a Flag Retirement Ceremony. Appropriate songs and/or readings may be added.

### Items needed:

- Flag to be retired
- Sharp scissors
- Fire to burn the flag (suggest a non-cooking fire, if possible)

### People needed:

- Color Guard – four girls, one for each corner of the flag.
- One or two girls to cut the flag
- One or two girls to lay the flag pieces on the fire.

### Opening:

Ceremonies for disposing the unserviceable flags originated at the American Legion National Convention of 1937. The Flag Code suggests that “when a flag has served its useful purpose, it should be destroyed, preferably by burning.” This solemn ceremony will be conducted with the utmost respect.

### Main Part:

1. Lower the flag from the pole or remove it from the staff and have the Color Guard carry it to the fire site
2. “Color Guard, advance.” (May carry flag folded or open on a pole). “Please stand for the Pledge of Allegiance.”
3. Place the stars (as the audience sees them) in the upper left-hand corner. This is an appropriate reading to start the ceremony:  
“Remember as you look at the flag that it is the symbol of our nation. It is red because of human sacrifice; blue because of the true blue loyalty of its defenders; and white to symbolize liberty – the land of the free. The stars are symbols of the united efforts and hope in the hearts of the many people striving to keep America great.”
4. Cut the field of blue from the stripes – have someone hold this piece.
5. Cut each strip from the flag and lay each piece, one at a time, across the flames.

**First Stripe** – “The thirteen stripes stand for the thirteen original colonies: Delaware, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Georgia, Connecticut, Massachusetts, Maryland, South Carolina, New Hampshire, Virginia, New York, North Carolina, and Rhode Island.”

**Second Stripe** – “The white stands for purity.”

**Third Stripe** – “The red stands for courage.”

**Fourth Stripe** – “Give me liberty or give me death.”

**Fifth Stripe** – “One if by land, two if by sea.”

**Sixth Stripe** – “We the people of the United States, in order to form a more perfect union, establish justice, insure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessing of liberty to ourselves and our posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.”





**Seventh Stripe** – “We hold these truths to be self evident, that all men are created equal. They are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights. Among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.”

**Eighth Stripe** – “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.”

**Ninth Stripe** – “Congress shall make no law abridging the freedom of speech or press.”

**Tenth Stripe** – “Four score and seven years ago, our fathers brought forth upon this continent a new nation, conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.”

**Eleventh Stripe** – “The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any state because they are female.”

**Twelfth Stripe** – “Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country.”

**Thirteenth Stripe** – “One small step for man, one giant leap for mankind.”

6. After the stripes have been burned, the field of blue is laid on the fire. All are silent until the entire piece burns to ash.
7. Out of respect, nothing should ever be added to the ceremonial fire after the flag has retired.
8. The ceremony ends with everyone departing in silence.
9. After the ashes have cooled, they should be buried.

Remember, this is a very solemn ceremony and should be done with utmost respect and reverence for the flag being retired.





# Retirement Ceremony for Girl Scout Flag

## I AM YOUR FLAG

I am your flag. I appear in many places. I have taken many forms and been called many names. I was authorized by Congress in 1818 in the form you see now and have remained unchanged except to add a new star each July 4th after a new state joined the Union, until I reached my present number of 50.

I am more than just red, white, and blue cloth shaped into a design. I am a silent sentinel of freedom. People of every country in the world know me on sight. Many countries love me as you do. Other countries look at me with contempt because they do not allow the freedom of democracy that I represent – but every country looks on me with respect. I am strong and people of America have made me strong. My strength comes from your willingness to give help to those who are in need. You strive for world peace and yet stand ready to fight oppression. You send resources and offer technology to less fortunate countries so they may strive to become self-sufficient. You feed starving children. You offer a home to anyone who will pledge allegiance to me. Your sons and daughters gather beneath me to offer their lives on the battlefields to preserve the liberty I represent. That's why I love the American people. That's why I have flown so proudly.

Girl Scouts are some of my favorite people. I listen to your patriotic songs. I am there at your flag ceremonies and I appreciate the tender care you give me. I feel the love when you say your pledge. I notice that your hand covers your heart when I am on parade and I ripple with pleasure when I see it.

Now I am tired and it is time for me to rest in the sacred flames of your campfire. My colors are faded and my cloth is tattered, but my spirit remains unbroken. To set my spirit loose, first cut the blue field away from my stripes. Tear each of my 13 stripes and lay them on the fire one at a time. As you do this, think about the 13 original colonies and the pioneers who carved a nation out of a wilderness. They risked everything to fight for the independence which we enjoy.

Put in red and white stripes (one by one) as you say the following:

My first state was Virginia, next Massachusetts, then New York, Maryland, Connecticut, Rhode Island, Delaware, North Carolina, South Carolina, New Jersey, New Hampshire, Pennsylvania, and finally Georgia.

Put in the blue field with stars as you say the following:

When my stripes are gone, kiss the blue field and lay it across the fire. Then stand silently as you watch each star twinkle and fade into ashes.

Now I am just a memory, but if there was a tear in your eye or a lump in your throat, if you felt a shiver in your spine as you watched me burn, then I will be back the next time you need me and my colors will be fresh and bright and my edges will not be ragged anymore. When I climb to the top of the flagpole, I will wave at you and remember the love and respect that you showed me here tonight. And now Girl Scouts – good night!



# Flag Ceremony

## **MORNING FLAG CEREMONY COLOR GUARD CALL-OUTS**

Girl Scouts Attention  
Color Guard Attention  
Color Guard Advance  
Color Guard Halt  
Color Guard Post Your Colors  
Color Guard Honor Your Colors  
Girl Scouts Honor the Colors  
Join me in the Pledge of Allegiance  
Join me in the Girl Scout Promise  
Join me in the Girl Scout Law  
Color Guard Retreat  
Color Guard Dismissed  
Girl Scouts Dismissed

## **EVENING FLAG CEREMONY COLOR GUARD CALL-OUTS**

Girl Scouts Attention  
Color Guard Attention  
Color Guard Advance  
Color Guard Halt  
Color Guard Honor Your Colors  
Girl Scouts Honor Your Colors  
Color Guard Retire the Colors  
Join Me in TAPS  
Color Guard Retreat  
Color Guard Dismissed  
Girl Scouts Dismissed

## **GIRL SCOUT PROMISE**

On my honor, I will try  
to serve God\* and my country,  
to help people at all times  
and to live by the Girl Scout Law

## **GIRL SCOUTS LAW**

I will do my best to be  
honest and fair,  
friendly and helpful,  
considerate and caring,  
courageous and strong,  
and responsible for what I say and  
do,  
and to respect myself and others,  
respect authority  
use resources wisely  
make the world a better place  
and be a sister to every Girl Scout

## **TAPS**

Day is done, Gone the Sun,  
From the lake, From the Hill  
From the Sky, All is Well  
Safely Rest, God is 'Nigh

  
**girl scouts**  
diamonds of arkansas,  
oklahoma and texas





Visit [arkansas.gov](https://arkansas.gov) to sign up for flag positioning alerts to be sent via text or check the bottom of the home page for the current day's positioning.

