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Street Level View  
**Evolution of the U.S. flag**  
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On Wednesday, the Fourth of July, the American flag will be displayed at many homes and businesses across the country.

Congress first authorized the flag on June 14, 1777, the date now observed as Flag Day in the United States.

The red in the flag is for valor, zeal and fervency. The white is for hope, purity, cleanliness of life and rectitude of conduct. The blue, the color of heaven, is for reverence to God, loyalty, sincerity, justice and truth.

The star symbolizes dominion and sovereignty, as well as lofty aspirations, according to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. The constellation of the stars within the union, one star for each state, is emblematic of the U.S. Constitution, which reserves individual sovereignty to the states except as to the rights delegated by the federal government.

Americans who want an American flag can get them from a variety of retail outlets.

On a recent July 4, a local residential real estate company placed small flags-on-a-stick by mailboxes in the front yards of my neighborhood. In examining the flag in my yard, I found that it was made in Taiwan. Having an American flag imported from another country seemed to dim the symbolic patriotism of displaying the flag.

The U.S. Census Bureau reports that U.S. flag imports in 2000 totaled \$747,800, including \$381,600 for flags made in Taiwan. Exports of American flags in 2000 totaled \$202,600 with Mexico being the leading customer, spending \$49,800.

Americans wanting a patriotism-enhanced flag can get one that flew over the U.S. Capitol. Just contact your congressman or U.S. senator. These flags, by law, must be manufactured in the United States.

On a normal day at the Capitol about 400 flags go up and then, just as quickly, come back down to be sent to constituents who order them from their members of Congress. Most members of Congress, including Oklahoma's representatives, have order forms on their Web sites.

The office of Rep. Frank Lucas, R-Okla., says they get regular requests from residents of Oklahoma's Sixth District.

Rep. Ernest Istook's office said that they got 43 requests for flags that flew over the Capitol for the 12 months ended in May. Eleven of the requests were for Eagle Scouts, five were for retirements, five for birthdays and four were for weddings. Oklahoma residents also wanted flags from Istook's office for Mother's Day, in honor of naturalization, completion of U.S. Army training and family reunions.

Istook's office reports that it normally takes about four weeks to process a request.

The flags are not free. In addition to the cost of the flag, a \$4.05 fee is charged for raising and lowering the flag and documentation, which can include the day the flag flew over the Capitol.

The cost of ordering flags from Istook's office ranges from \$16.74 for a 3-foot by 5-foot nylon flag to \$31.06 for a 5-by-8 cotton flag.

The service started in 1937 when a congressman requested a flag that had flown over the Capitol. Word quickly spread and soon there were so many requests that a special Flag Office was created with only one purpose -- lowering and raising the flags and shipping them out.

Today, about 100,000 flags are raised and lowered each year. The record day for flag raisings was July 4, 1976, when 10,000 flags were flown marking the bicentennial of the signing of the Declaration of Independence.

The first official American flag was the 13-star version that first flew on June 14, 1777. The flag was redesigned and stars added through the years as states joined the union.

On July 4, 1908, the 46th star was added to the flag marking the addition of Oklahoma to the United States on Nov. 16, 1907.

This was the official flag for four years.

Theodore Roosevelt and William H. Taft both served as president under the 46-star flag.

The 46-star flag flew until July 4, 1912, when the 48-star version became the official flag with stars added to the addition of New Mexico on Jan. 6, 1912, and Arizona on Feb. 14, 1912.

The 48-star flag flew until Jan. 3, 1958, when a 49th star was added for Alaska. The 50th star was added for Hawaii on Aug. 15, 1959. It is the 27th official flag.

And what if a 51st star is ever needed? Robert G. Heft of Napoleon, Ohio, is ready.

Heft, as a high school student in Lancaster, Ohio, in 1958, designed a 50-star flag as a school project. He arranged the 50 stars in five rows of six stars alternating with four rows of five stars.

His teacher gave him a B minus on the project saying it lacked originality. But, the teacher added, Heft would get a higher grade if Congress accepted the design.

Heft sent the flag to his congressman, Rep. Walter Moeller, who got Heft's design accepted.

A few weeks later, Heft designed a 51-star flag with six rows of stars, beginning with a row of nine and alternating with rows of eight.

Now, 42 years later, Heft is just waiting for a need for a 51- star flag.

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