

# Protocol for the National Flag

**When Bunreacht na hÉireann/the Constitution of Ireland was enacted in 1937 the Tricolour was formally recognised as the Nation’s Flag.**

**“The national flag is the tricolour of green, white and orange.”**

Article 7 - Constitution Of Ireland  
Airteagal 7 - Bunreacht Na Héireann.

The following guidelines are intended to assist individuals in giving due respect to the National Flag. There are no statutory requirements, so observance of these guidelines is a matter for each person. It is expected that the National Flag will be treated at all times with appropriate respect by those who use it. The Department of the Taoiseach has general responsibility in relation to the National Flag. This responsibility is primarily concerned with the guidelines for the flying of the Flag. The Department’s role, therefore, is an advisory one. The protocols for the National flag were first adopted by a unanimous resolution of Seanad Éireann on the eve of the 165th anniversary of the first flying of a tricolour by Thomas F. Meagher. In the chamber on that occasion for the ceremony was the Great Great Grandson of Brigadier General Thomas F. Meagher. The resolution was tabled by Senator Mark Daly and was supported by all sides of the house. It was the first time either House of the Oireachtas formally adopted protocols for the National Flag.

## Design

1. The National Flag is rectangular in shape, the width being twice the depth (measurement from top to bottom). The three colours – green, white and orange – are of equal size and vertically disposed.
2. Sometimes shades of yellow or gold, instead of orange, are seen at civilian functions. This is a misrepresentation of the National Flag and should be actively discouraged.
3. The Flag should normally be displayed on a staff, the green being next to the staff, the white in the middle and the orange farthest from the staff. Provided that the correct proportions are observed, the Flag may be made to any convenient size.
4. The addition of a gold fringe or tassels to a national flag is a long-standing international tradition. A fringe is not considered an integral part of the flag so cannot be said to interfere with its design, unlike say lettering or emblems superimposed on the flag, which should never be used. The fringe is considered to be purely for decorative purposes and can therefore be used when the flag is displayed indoors or on ceremonial occasions outdoors.

## Flying, displaying and placing

1. No flag or pennant should be flown above the National Flag.
2. Only one National Flag should be displayed in each group of flags or at each location. In all cases, the National Flag should be in the place of honour.
3. When the National Flag is flown at a building or entrance along with other flags of equal height, it should be first on the right (on an observer’s left). See Section 6 for guidelines on flying the National Flag with flags of other nations.
4. When the National Flag is carried with another flag or flags, it should be carried in the place of honour: on the marching right – that is, on the left of an observer towards whom the flags are approaching.
5. While being carried, the National Flag should not be dipped by way of salute or compliment, except to the dead during memorial ceremonies.
6. When the National Flag is used to drape a coffin, the green should be at the head of the coffin.
7. When displayed on a platform, the National Flag should be above and behind the speaker’s desk.
8. When the National Flag is displayed either horizontally or vertically against a wall or other background, the green should be on the right (an observer’s left) in the horizontal position or uppermost in the vertical position.
9. In the event of a display of crossed staffs the National Flag should be to the right and to the fore, that is to the left of an observer who is facing the flag. Its staff should be in front of the other flag or flags.

## Occasions and times when the National Flag is flown

1. The National Flag is flown daily at all military posts and from a limited number of State buildings.
2. It is also flown on St Patrick’s Day (the National Holiday), Easter Sunday and Easter Monday (in commemoration of the Rising of 1916), and the National Day of Commemoration (on the Sunday closest to 11 July, the date of the Anglo-Irish Truce in 1921).
3. On these occasions the National Flag is flown from all State buildings throughout the country that are equipped with flagpoles, and many private individuals and concerns also fly it.
4. The National Flag is flown at other significant national and local events such as festivals and commemorations.
5. The National Flag is normally displayed in the open only from sunrise to sunset, except on the occasion of public meetings, processions or funerals, when it may be displayed for the duration of such function.

The National Flag may be flown by night as well as by day as long as it is properly illuminated at all times, preferably by spotlight.

## Flying and displaying the National Flag with Flags of other Nations

1. When the National flag is flown with the flags of other nations, each flag should have the same width and should fly from a separate flagpole of the same height.
2. International protocol prohibits the flying of any nation’s flag higher than another in peacetime. If, however, one flagpole happens to be higher than the rest, then the National Flag is flown from that flagpole. In such cases, no additional National Flag can be flown.
3. When the group of flags of the European Union are flown, the sequence is alphabetical, based on the first letter of the country’s name in its primary local language (see appendix). The flags should be flown from an observer’s left to right with the European Union flag flown from the first flagstaff (figure g).
4. An alternative order of flags is to begin on the left with the National Flag and place the European Union flag on the far right of the group, as seen by an observer.
5. Where either an even or an odd number of flags is flown in line on staffs of equal height, the National Flag should be first on the right of the line (i.e. on an observer’s left). Where one of these flags is that of the European Union, the European Union flag should be flown on the immediate right of the National Flag as seen by an observer.
6. Where, however, an odd number of flags is displayed from staffs grouped so that there is one staff in the centre and higher than the others, the National Flag should be displayed from the central staff. Where one of these flags is that of the European Union, the European Union flag should be flown from the first flagstaff on the observer’s left.

## Carrying of the National Flag

1. When the National Flag is carried with another flag, or flags, it should be carried in the place of honour: the marching right - that is on the left of an observer towards whom the flags are approaching.
2. Where one of these flags is that of the European Union, the European Union flag should be carried on the immediate right of the National Flag as seen by an observer.
3. In the event of a display of crossed staffs, the National Flag should be to the right and to the fore, that is to the left of an observer who is facing the flag. Its staff should be in front of the other flag or flags.

## Half-masting the National Flag and its display during times of mourning

1. The half-masting of national flags is a well-established procedure whereby countries bestow an honour and express a collective sense of sorrow.
2. Half-mast means the flag is flown two-thirds of the way up the flagpole, with at least the depth (measurement from top to bottom) of the flag between the top of the half-masted flag and the top of the flagpole (figure l). Traditionally, this is con-sidered to leave space for the invisible flag of death. The National Flag is at half-mast in any position below the top of the staff but never below the middle point of the staff.
3. When being hoisted to half-mast, the Flag should first be brought to the peak of the staff and then lowered to the half-mast position. It should again be brought to the peak of the staff before it is finally lowered.
4. Where the National Flag is flown at half-mast, no other flag should be flown.
5. On the death of a national or international figure, the National Flag is flown at half-mast on all prominent government buildings equipped with a flag pole, under advice from the Department of the Taoiseach. The Department may also advise the half-mast display of the flag after other tragic events. The death of a prominent local figure may be marked locally by the National Flag being flown at half-mast.
6. A National Flag at half-mast may be displayed, day and night, for the duration of a funeral provided the flag is illuminated.
7. While being carried, the National Flag should not be dipped by way of salute or compliment except to the dead during memorial ceremonies.
8. When used to drape a coffin, the green should be at the head of the coffin.

## Folding of the National Flag

If a coffin has been draped with the National Flag, the military tradition for the ceremonial folding of the National Flag (which may be followed by others) is as follows:

- Once removed from the coffin, the Coffin Bearers (ideally six people) fold the Flag in the following manner:
- Orange passed under to white - white and orange passed under to green (following this manoeuvre, green is on top, orange in the middle and white underneath) - green, orange and white folded once, with green remaining facing outwards and complete Flag draped over extended left arm of a Coffin Bearer (this assumes the use of a standard size flag; larger flags may need to be folded twice, with green always facing out-wards).
- The folded Flag is then normally presented to the next of kin of the deceased.

## Hoisting and lowering

1. In raising or lowering, the National Flag should not be allowed to touch the ground.
2. When being hoisted to half-mast, the Flag should first be brought to the peak of the staff and then lowered to the half-mast position. It should again be brought to the peak of the staff before it is finally lowered.
3. The National Flag is at half-mast in any position below the top of the staff but never below the middle point of the staff. As a general guide, the half-mast position may be taken as that where the top of the flag is the depth of the flag below the top of the staff.

## Saluting the National Flag

1. On ceremonial occasions when the National Flag is being hoisted or lowered, or when it is passing by in a parade or when the National Anthem is being played, all present should face it, stand to attention and salute. Persons in uniform who normally salute with the hand should give the hand salute. Persons in civilian attire should salute by standing to attention.
2. When the National Flag is being carried past in a parade, the salute is rendered when the Flag is six paces away and the salute is held until the Flag has passed by. Where more than one National Flag is carried, the salute should be given only to the leading Flag.

## The National Flag and the National Anthem

When the National Anthem, Amhrán na bhFiann, is played in the presence of the National Flag, all present should face the National Flag, stand to attention and salute it, remaining at the salute until the last note of the music.

## Respect for the National Flag

1. Care should be taken at all times, including when raising or lowering, to ensure that the National Flag does not touch the ground, trail in water or become entangled in trees or other obstacles.
2. The National Flag should never be defaced by placing slogans, logos, lettering or pictures of any kind on it, for example at sporting events.
3. The National Flag should not be draped on cars, trains, boats or other modes of transport. It should not be carried flat, but should always be carried aloft and free, except when used to drape a coffin; on such an occasion, the green should be at the head of the coffin.
4. The National Flag when used as a decoration should always be treated with due respect. It may be used as a discreet lapel button or rosette or a small version may be used as part of a centrepiece for a table. When used in the latter context with the flags of other nations, the National Flag should also be displayed in the place of honour on a nearby flag staff.
5. Where more than one National Flag is flown on festive occasions, they should be of uniform dimensions. Bunting of the National Colours may also be used on festive occasions.
6. When displayed on a platform, the National Flag should not be used to cover the speaker’s desk, nor should it be draped over the platform.

## Proper disposal of a worn or frayed National Flag

When the National Flag has become worn or frayed it is no longer fit for display, and should not be used in any manner implying disrespect. It should be destroyed or disposed of in a dignified way.

## Use in printed or electronic format

When the National Flag is being reproduced in printed or electronic format, the principles of respect outlined in these guidelines apply.

**“The White in the Centre signifies a lasting truce between Orange and Green. I trust between its folds the hands of the Irish Catholics and the Irish Protestants may be clasped in generous and heroic brotherhood”**

Thomas F. Meagher 13Th  
April 1848

