

How to Properly Illuminate a Flag

Flags are meaningful to us. We fly our nation's flag, our state or city's flag. We also fly flags to represent branches of service, significant causes and faiths, and even sometimes to symbolize our companies.

If you're flying the American flag—or the flag of countries worldwide—etiquette dictates proper nighttime illumination. And, no, flying the flag near a streetlight is not sufficient. The American flag is required to have its own illumination source.

So, let's talk about lighting a flag to show it its due respect.

All too often, we see flags illuminated with HID (high-intensity discharge) lighting and wide angle floods like 500 or more-watt metal halide lighting. This is overkill, and it contributes highly to sky glow light pollution.

Flying the flag at night should be done in a way that respects the flag and our environment. For example, a 3-foot by 5-foot flag on a 25-foot pole can be easily illuminated with two 1000 lumen +/- equivalent light output directional spot fixtures. For larger flags on taller poles, there may need to be three fixtures with more intensity to triangulate the flag.

It's also important to realize that you don't have to light the flagpole, just the flag. The beam of light can be narrow. Most people will use a large flood light for a flag when they simply need to use a spotlight instead. You don't want to flood the entire area to illuminate the flag; you want to spotlight the flag. Move the light fixtures about 3 or 4 feet from the flagpole and use a narrow beam spread of about 15 degrees, then aim the light at the ball on top of the pole. This will ensure the flag is illuminated while not creating a distraction from lighting the pole itself.

