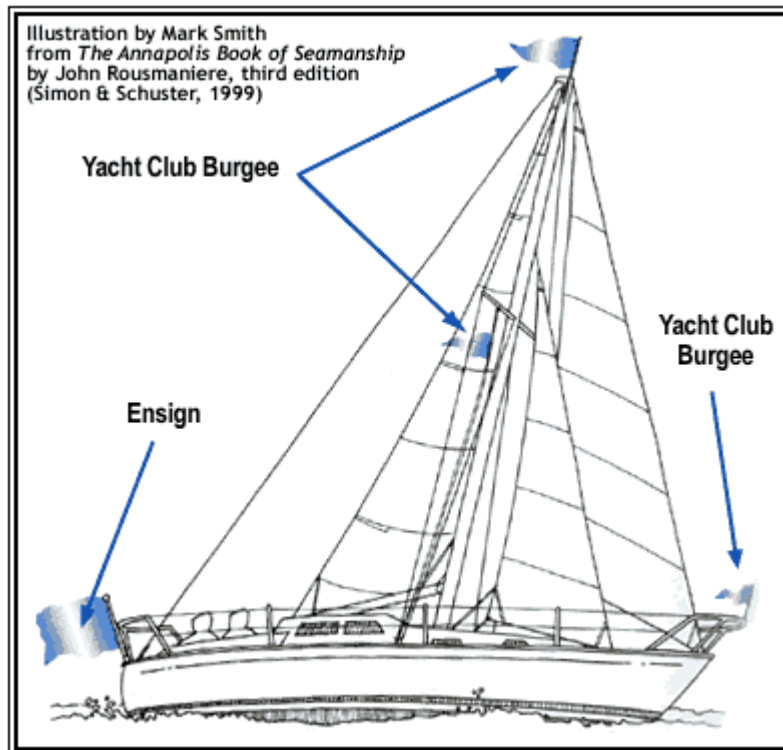


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**The Bugee** Let's begin with the burgee, a small flag displaying the symbol of the skipper's yacht club or other sailing organization. Although it may be flown day and night, in order to save wear and tear, it's usually lowered before the crew goes ashore.

Traditionally, the burgee is flown at the head (top) of the forwardmost mast on a small pole (called a pig stick) hoisted on a light halyard (flag halyard). Hoisting a pig stick is an art. When sailing on a beam reach, pull it up quickly on the leeward side, then pull down hard on the halyard to steady and straighten the stick. The halyard may be secured on the mast (at the risk of clanging against it), on a cleat on a shroud (which may foul jib sheets)—my preference is to make it fast to a toggle or turnbuckle at the bottom of a shroud.

We don't see masthead burgees much these days because flying them up there risks damaging some expensive equipment and destroying the flag with chafe. This is why many people opt to fly the burgee lower in the rig, hoisted to the end of the lowest starboard spreader on a flag halyard. While this practice is decried by purists, it is a reasonable adaptation of another tradition, which is that the starboard rigging is a position of honor (when we visit a foreign port, that's where we fly the host country's flag). Besides being reasonable, flying the burgee in the starboard rigging is so widespread a **custom** that to try to end it would be like attempting to hold back the tide. Opposing popular usage is rarely successful in any activity, and never in the field of communications, where relevance triumphs over tradition. In this case, the new tradition is more relevant than the old one, which was developed by sea captains and long-ago yachtsmen who never had to deal with VHF antennas.



**Properly observing flag etiquette can add fun to your time on the water.**

There's a third possibility for the burgee that makes good sense. This is to fly it from a short flag staff (called a jack staff) on the center of the bow pulpit. There the flag is visible on both tacks (unlike the starboard rigging), and won't damage any equipment. A forward location for the burgee on a short staff is common in powerboats. Oddly, it's rarely seen on sailboats even though it's approved by the most stringent of all guides to flag etiquette, the Yacht Routine of the New York Yacht Club.

The burgee's dimensions are, on the fly, approximately two inches for each foot of distance between the water and the top of the tallest mast; and on the hoist, two-thirds the length of the fly.

**The Private Signal** A private signal is a small, custom-designed flag that carries symbols standing for the owner. A flag manufacturer can make flags to custom designs. I used to sail with a strong-minded

skipper named Page in a boat named *Pageant*. His private signal showed a ceremonial trumpet, which nicely reflected both the boat's name and his colorful personality. The signal, which is sized according to the rule for burgees, may be flown day or night, but is not displayed when another sailor is in command. (The rule is that the private signal and burgee follow the sailor, not the boat.)

On a split-rig (multi-masted) boat, the private signal traditionally is flown at the head of the aftermost mast. The great ocean sailor Bill Snaith observed that the yawl rig was good for providing three things: shade, a back rest for the steerer, and a place for the owner's ego to express itself with a private signal. On boats lacking a second mast, the private signal may be flown from the starboard rigging, either below the burgee or alone.

**The Ensign** Boats should fly the national flag, and most pleasure boats in US waters have a choice between two of them. One is the yacht ensign, with its fouled anchor over a circle of 13 stars, and the other is the familiar 50-star flag. While some yacht clubs specify that one or the other be flown, discretion often lies with the skipper, except that the 50-star flag must be flown by any boat outside US waters and also by documented boats in all waters.



**From sunup to sunset, it's appropriate to fly the ensign, except when racing.**

The size of a nautical flag is determined by the size of the boat that flies it. On the fly, the ensign should be a minimum of one inch of flag for every one foot of the boat's overall length. The hoist is two-thirds the length of the fly.

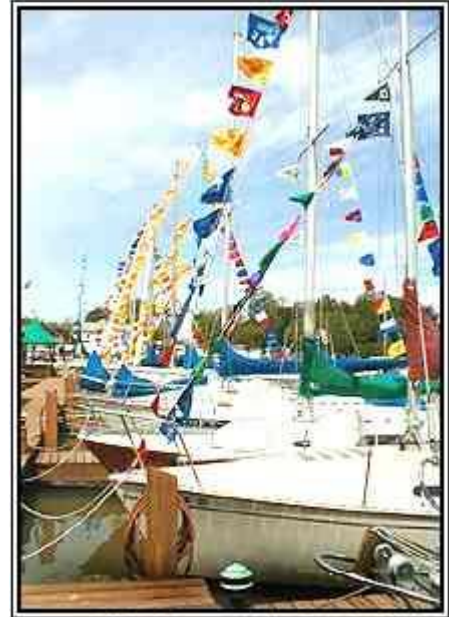
Fly the ensign from morning colors (8:00 a.m.) to evening colors (sunset) whether the boat is at rest, under sail, or under power. There are exceptions to this rule. The ensign is not flown by a boat in a race, as a signal to other boats. To prevent wear and tear, the flag need not be

flown when out of sight of other vessels or when nobody is aboard. The flag is flown while entering or leaving a port, even at night. At morning colors, the ensign is hoisted rapidly before other flags. At evening colors, the ensign is lowered slowly and with ceremony after other flags come down.

Boats today fly the ensign from the stern, which provides the best all-round visibility. It should be on a staff that is sufficiently long and angled, and that is offset to one side (traditionally the starboard side), so the flag flies clear of engine exhaust and rigging.

For many years, until around World War II, most ensigns were flown from the leech of the aftermost sail—a sloop or cutter's mainsail or a ketch or yawl's mizzen. That position is still available. On a Marconi rig, the ensign may be flown about two-thirds of the way up; on a gaff rig, just under the gaff. In either case the flag may be sewn into the leech or hoisted on a halyard through a leech cringle (reinforced hole) so the ensign can be lowered to avoid chafe, say on a permanent backstay.

**Flagpoles** People often wonder why at a yacht club or other boating organization's headquarters there is a flagpole on which the ensign is flown below the burgee. This is not a sign of disrespect but a carryover of the tradition of flying the ensign on the leech under the gaff. Look carefully and you'll see that the **flag pole** is a gaff-rigged mast with the gaff on the shore side, as though the yacht club were a **ship** heading out to sea with her ensign flying aft and the burgee at the flagpole's head, just as it would be flown at the masthead of a pre-VHF sailing vessel



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**Dressing Ship** A nice custom is to surround the boat with colorful code flags in order to celebrate a special day, like the Fourth of July, a yacht club's opening, or a fleet gathering. Moored or anchored sailboats dress ship by hanging code flags from their masts in lines stretching from the water below the bow to the water below the stern. A recommended flag sequence that produces a colorful display is (from bow to stern): AB2, UJ1, KE3, GH6, IV5, FL4, DM7, P0, Third Repeater, RN, First Repeater, ST Zero, CX9, WQ8, ZY, Second Repeater.

**Special occasions call for dressing ship, which is a nice custom in any waters.**

In this way, as in all flag etiquette, we sailors not only honor our traditions, but tell the world how distinct and even playful we are.

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