



## Poppies honor the fallen and support the living

Red flower is a symbol of sacrifice

May 16, 2023

By Sara Fowler  
Managing Editor, American Legion Auxiliary National Headquarters

### Share this story

Facebook  
Twitter  
LinkedIn  
Reddit  
Telegram  
Tumblr  
WhatsApp  
Email

### Appears In

#VetResources  
Vets Experience

For many Americans, Memorial Day weekend means barbecues, pool parties and the official start to summer. But for the Veteran support community, the last weekend in May is set aside to honor the brave men and women who made the ultimate sacrifice while defending our nation's freedoms.

And it comes with a familiar visual—the poppy.

The iconic poppy symbol dates back to World War I, when the red flower flourished in Europe. Scientists attributed its growth to the soils in France and Belgium becoming enriched with lime from the rubble left by war. The beautiful poppy grew out from destruction, seeming to represent the blood shed during battle.

To enhance the focus on the real reason behind Memorial Day, organizations within The American Legion Family brought “National Poppy Day” to the United States by asking Congress to designate the Friday before Memorial Day as National Poppy Day.

On this day, Americans are encouraged to wear a red poppy to honor the fallen and support the living service members who have worn, and currently wear, our nation's uniform.

With its century-old legacy of “Service Not Self,” American Legion Auxiliary members and volunteers nationwide—and in some foreign countries—participate in poppy-related activities in May. They hand out poppies in exchange for a donation that goes directly to support the future of Veterans, active-duty military personnel, and their families with medical and financial needs. The distribution of this bright-red memorial flower to the public is a huge component of the ALA's Poppy Program, one of the organization's oldest and most widely recognized.

Veterans will see Auxiliary members distribute poppies at various places this year — at two manufacturing plants in Ohio, and in Pennsylvania. They'll poppy cookies, poppy coloring books and even poppy doggie bandanas. In Alaska, 7,000 red crepe paper poppies will be used to create poppy bouquets for Veterans' graves.

From big cities to small towns, thousands of poppies will be exchanged for a donation outside storefronts, proclamations will be signed by city mayors for National Poppy Day, children will be encouraged to participate in a poppy coloring contest, and much more.

No matter the generation or what is going on in the world, Veterans will always find American Legion Auxiliary members handing out poppies. And for all Americans, the

meaning of the poppy will never change — it will always be focused on our Veterans. All gave some, and some gave all.

Part of The American Legion Family, the American Legion Auxiliary is a community of volunteers serving Veterans, military and their families. The organization is made up of the grandmothers, mothers, sisters, spouses, direct, and adopted female descendants of members of The American Legion, and women who of their own right are eligible for membership in The American Legion. To learn more about the American Legion Auxiliary or the poppy, visit [the ALA for Veterans website](#).