

Special Section

Missouri's State Symbols

If you were to visit the Capitol in Jefferson City, one thing you might notice is the flags flying outside. One is the American flag, the familiar red and white stripes with white stars on a field of blue in one corner. The other is our state flag. Look around the square in front of the Capitol and you will see that flag flying in front of several buildings: the Truman State Office Building, the Department of Transportation, the State Supreme Court, the Governor's Mansion, and the Department of Natural Resources.

The state flag is a symbol that tells you those buildings are state office buildings. The state flag is just one of nearly two dozen symbols that represent our state. A **symbol** is something that stands for something else.

State Flag

Many flags have flown over Missouri in its history, but it wasn't until 1913 that the state had its own flag. Marie Elizabeth Watkins, the wife of a state senator, designed it. The flag is divided into three equal horizontal bars, red on top, white in the middle, and blue on the bottom.

The colors repeat those found in the American flag. Those colors are

also borrowed from other flags that have flown over our state. The blue is from the French flag, the red from the Spanish flag, and the white is from both of the flags, each of which flew over Missouri before it became part of the United States. In the center is the state seal surrounded by 24 stars.

State Seal

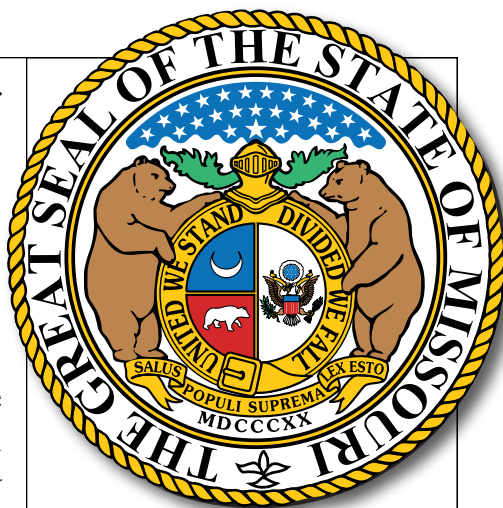
Perhaps no symbol tells us more about Missouri than the state seal. It is filled with symbols, including 24 stars that tell us Missouri was the 24th state admitted to the Union. Grizzly bears in the seal stand for strength and bravery. The Roman numerals MDCCCXX stand for the year 1820, the year Missouri applied for statehood. Other symbols in the seal include the state motto, the eagle coat-of-arms, the motto of the United States, and several other symbols that are borrowed from the days of knights and kings and queens. The crescent moon, for example, represents a hope that the state will grow just as the moon does from crescent to full moon. The state seal is used on all official documents and licenses and appears on state buildings. A large bronze seal is on the floor of the Capitol directly beneath the dome.

State Motto

Carved above the front doors of the Capitol are the Latin words *Salus Populi Suprema Lex Esto*. In English, these words mean “The welfare of the people shall be the supreme law.” In other words, our state’s laws should make life better for Missourians.

State Nickname

Missouri has been called many things including the “Cave State,” because of its many caves, and the “Land Where the Rivers Run,” because of its many rivers. Its most often-used nickname, and the one that appears on our license plates, is the “Show Me State.” There are many stories about how the state got that nickname. The most commonly told story is that a congressman from Missouri told a crowd during a speech that fancy words couldn’t impress or convince him, explaining, “I am from Missouri and you’ll have to show me.”



Above: The Missouri state seal. **Below:** Missouri is known for its many rivers. **Opposite Page, Top:** The Missouri state flag. **Opposite, Bottom:** The State Capitol, with the state motto chiseled into the stone above the entrance.





State Song, Folk Dance, Musical Instrument

Missouri's state song, "The Missouri Waltz," was written by J. R. Shannon with music by John V. Eppel in 1914. It did not become popular until 1945 when Harry S. Truman became president of the United States. The General Assembly named it the state song in 1949.

The square dance is Missouri's state American folk dance. The square dance has been popular since pioneer times, and there are square dance clubs all over Missouri. An instrument commonly found at square dances is the fiddle, the state musical instrument.

State Mineral, Rock

The state mineral is galena, a dark grey mineral that breaks into shiny cubes. It is valuable because it contains lead. Large deposits of galena mined in eastern and southwestern Missouri have helped to make our state one of the world's leading lead producers.

The state rock is mozarkite, a mineral found in Benton County. It comes in many colors, the most common being red, green, and purple. It can be cut and polished to make beautiful jewelry.



Symbols That Grow Here

Some symbols of Missouri are those that are found growing here. Our state tree is the flowering dogwood, whose white sepals bloom in early spring and can be seen deep in the woods or in our yards. (A *sepal* is something like a leaf that protects the flower of a tree or plant.)

The state flower is the white hawthorn, a member of the rose family. The hawthorn is often found growing wild along fencerows.

The eastern walnut is the state tree nut, and the norton/cynthiana is the state grape. Walnut trees are found growing all over the state. Norton/cynthiana grapes are among some of the oldest varieties of grapes in the United States. They are used to make wine.

Symbols That Live Here

The eastern bluebird is the state bird. It lives in rural areas, building its nests in holes found in poles and small trees or in specially designed bluebird houses mounted on fence posts. It is considered a symbol of happiness.

The state animal is the Missouri mule. It is an especially strong animal used in farming, to pull heavy loads, and for riding. It was important in helping early settlers and farmers in Missouri.

The Missouri fox trotting horse is the state horse. It was bred by early settlers in the Ozarks and was good at climbing the steep, narrow paths of the rugged hills.

The honeybee is the state insect. It is valuable not only for making honey, but for pollinating Missouri food crops.

The state fish is the channel catfish, found in Missouri's rivers and a favorite dish at fish fries. Another fish, the paddlefish, is Missouri's state aquatic animal. It is found in rivers and looks much like it did in prehistoric times.

The American bullfrog is the state amphibian. The bullfrog's deep-throated call is a familiar sound in spring.

The bullfrog is one of two state symbols pushed by Missouri schoolchildren. The other is the crinoid, a sea animal that buries its tail in the sea floor and then collects tiny food particles from the passing currents. It looks like a plant and is sometimes called a sea lily. It is the state fossil because it last lived here when an ocean covered Missouri 500 million years ago. Another prehistoric resident of Missouri, the duck-billed dinosaur, is the state dinosaur. Fossil remains of this plant-eating dinosaur have been found near Glen Allen.

Missouri Day

Ever since 1915, the third Wednesday in October has been Missouri Day. Maybe your school has a celebration on that day to remember our state's history, to learn about its people and places, and to celebrate the achievements of all Missourians. If your school doesn't have a celebration, maybe a class project might be to start an annual Missouri Day.



Top: The eastern bluebird.
Above: Today's crinoids are similar to those that lived millions of years ago.
Below: A bullfrog.
Opposite Page, Top: A fiddle.
Opposite Page, Bottom: A flowering dogwood tree.

