



Smithsonian Gardens

Picking the National Flower

A Primary Source Investigation



David Burpee and Burpee Seeds



W. Atlee Burpee & Co. Seed Company

- Founded in 1876 by W. Atlee Burpee
- Mail order seed supplier to home gardener, retail, and wholesale customers
- Known for its widely-distributed seed catalogs
- Developed new plant varieties
- At one point Burpee's was the largest mail order seed company in the world

David Burpee

- Son of company founder; took over as president in 1915
- Strong interest in marigolds (photo on the left shows David Burpee with marigolds)
- Held a contest for gardeners to breed a white marigold; developed the first scent-free marigold



The National Flower Debate



- Efforts to name a national flower (or floral emblem) for the United States date to the 1890s
- Many nations had national flowers, for example:
 - England: rose
 - Spain: carnation
 - Guatemala: monja blanca orchid
- By the 1950s, many contenders had been considered in national polls, opinion pieces, and even proposed legislation
- Proposed flowers included the rose, corn tassel, goldenrod, mountain laurel (all pictured here) and others
- David Burpee gets involved in the debate in early 1959, championing the marigold

How is a new national symbol named?

Through the same process as a federal law: approval by both the House of Representatives and Senate in Congress and the President.

Introduction to Lobbying in the U.S.



Lobbyists work to influence government officials, including working for or against the passage of legislation by Congress.

- 1791: The First Amendment of the Bill of Rights protects right to petition the government
- 1946: Regulation of Lobbying Act requires lobbyists (persons and organizations) to register with Congress and submit quarterly reports on how much they are paid and how much they spend
- 1954: The Supreme Court finds the 1946 registration requirements apply only to paid lobbyists communicating directly with members of Congress about passing or defeating legislation

David Burpee registered as a lobbyist for the marigold in 1959, even though he was not legally required to do so

Image Sources

Title Slide

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1958 Burpee's Seeds: the best that grow. W. Atlee Burpee & Co., 1958. <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/item/328008#page/1/mode/1up>. Image from the Biodiversity Heritage Library. Contributed by U.S. Department of Agriculture, National Agricultural Library, Henry G. Gilbert Nursery and Seed Trade Catalog Collection. | www.biodiversitylibrary.org

Burpee's Farm Annual. W. Atlee Burpee & Co., 1891. <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/item/162248#page/3/mode/1up>. Image from the Biodiversity Heritage Library. Contributed by U.S. Department of Agriculture, National Agricultural Library, Henry G. Gilbert Nursery and Seed Trade Catalog Collection. | www.biodiversitylibrary.org

Smithsonian Institution, Archives of American Gardens, W. Atlee Burpee & Company Records. California Trial Fields, David Burpee with Marigolds, "Farm Operations," Box 279. <https://sova.si.edu/record/aaq.bur/ref1128>.

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Smithsonian Institution, Archives of American Gardens, Ken Druse garden photography collection. Kalmia. <https://sova.si.edu/record/aaq.dru/ref1970>.

A Brief Introduction to Lobbying in the U.S.

View of U.S. Capitol; ca. 2013; Records of the Federal Highway Administration. [<https://www.docsteach.org/documents/document/view-of-us-capitol>]