Americans love to celebrate being an American, especially during the warmer months. Three of our most important national holidays mark the beginning, middle and end of summer. We celebrate those who fought for freedom, for a nation born from the need for independence, and for those who have toiled for the strength and prosperity of our nation.

These holidays bring an excitement that comes from more than just having a day off. It comes from being able to gather with family and friends and celebrate the fullness of our lives. We plan picnics, parades and places to sit during the fireworks display. We swell with unabashed patriotism, proudly waving flags and thanking our lucky stars that we are Americans.

This summer, as you enjoy the many things that make this country great, from baseball and barbeque, blue jeans to blues, be sure to include another All-American in the festivities—popcorn. Popcorn is one of the oldest and most beloved American foods. It’s been around for thousands of years, yet over time, it has remained a simple little kernel of goodness. Wholesome and whole grain, popcorn costs just pennies per serving.

For some star-spangled snacks that’ll have you popping with pride, try these recipes courtesy of the Popcorn Board (www.popcorn.org).

**Red Hot Poppers**

Makes: about 24 balls

Preparation time: 25 minutes

**Ingredients:**
- 3 quarts popped popcorn
- 4 tablespoons (1/2 stick) butter or margarine
- 3 cups miniature marshmallows
- 1/2 cups red hot cinnamon flavored candies red and blue confection stars
- red licorice string

**Directions:**
1. Spread a large sheet of plastic wrap onto a work surface and spray within cooking spray.
2. Spray a large mixing bowl lightly with cooking spray and place popcorn inside.
3. In a medium saucepan, melt butter over low heat. Stir in marshmallows until marshmallows are melted and mixture is smooth. Pour over popcorn, adding red hot candies, and mix well until coated.
4. Spray hands with cooking spray and form mixture into 24 balls. Gently press red and blue stars onto balls. Place a piece of licorice string on top of each ball.

For more simple and tasty popcorn recipes, visit www.popcorn.org