

## **The Egg: An Easter Treasure**

By Sr. Kathy O'Keefe on behalf of the Ecology Committee

One of my favourite childhood memories is the delight that I felt when my Aunt Frances gifted me with a large Laura Secord Easter egg with my name written on it. Perhaps some of your best recollections of Easter also include eggs. Have you ever wondered how eggs originally became associated with Easter?

Since egg production was dependent on sunlight, prior to the introduction of industrial farming, hens laid very few eggs over the winter months. With the coming of spring, eggs appeared once again. The egg, an ancient symbol of new life and rebirth, was associated with pagan festivals celebrating spring. Over time, this custom was adopted for Easter celebrations.

During the Lenten season, eggs were formerly a forbidden food. Thus, our tradition of having pancakes on Shrove Tuesday began. The egg is seen by followers of Christianity as a symbol of resurrection, while being dormant it contains a new life within it. Some Christians symbolically link the cracking open of Easter eggs with Jesus' emergence from the tomb. In Orthodox churches, Easter eggs are blessed by the priest and distributed to the congregation at the end of the Paschal Vigil.

Decorating eggshells is an ancient practice. Engraved ostrich eggs discovered in Africa are 60,000 years old. As an Easter tradition, decorative eggs date back as far as the 13<sup>th</sup> century. Christians in Mesopotamia dyed eggs red symbolizing the suffering and death of Christ Jesus. Many cultures, especially Ukrainians, have their own tradition of egg decoration. Cadbury's made the modern chocolate Easter egg in 1875, two years after the first one was created by J.S. Fry and Sons of England.

Using hard boiled eggs, **naturally dyed** Easter eggs are a wonderful option. There are many forms of dye from which to choose, such as: raspberries, red wine, beets, red and purple cabbages, red and yellow onions, kale, parsley, spinach, carrots, blueberries, tea, coffee, chili powder, and cayenne pepper. Also, eggs can be boiled in natural substances such as oak or alder bark or black walnut shells.

You can bypass the process of dying Easter eggs by raising breeds of chickens that are known for producing a rainbow of coloured eggs. The Araucana hens, originally from Chile, lay blue eggs. While the Ameraucana hens, bred in the United States,

lay light blue to greenish blue eggs. “**Easter eggers**” are a mixed breed of chickens that produce pink, blue, green, sage, and yellow eggs that resemble dyed Easter eggs.

The tradition of hiding Easter eggs began in Central Europe. Martin Luther instituted outdoor egg hunts for his congregation. The modern-day rabbit comes from the 17<sup>th</sup>-century folkloric *Osterhase*, a German egg-laying hare. When German immigrants came to North America, their children made nests in which this creature could lay its coloured eggs. Eventually nests became decorated baskets. Rabbits, known to be prolific procreators, are an ancient symbol of fertility and new life. Whether or not Easter eggs come to you from chickens or rabbits, they certainly are a welcome site on Easter morning!

**Credits:**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4Xgk6k.ovjM> *Easter: Scottish Three-Year Old's Take on the News*” BBC Comedy April 12, 2017

*How Did Easter Eggs Become a Tradition?* Sorcha McCrory Managing Editor at “Scandinavia Standard”

*How Did the Egg Come to Represent Easter?* Food Historian Sam Bilton “English Heritage” 16 March 2020

Farmers’ Almanac Staff Feb. 22, 2021

*Easter Egg* Wikipedia