



Extension News Column

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To: Mary Beth Smetzer
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Re: CES Column to run in Our Town section, Tuesday, March 22

Dyeing Easter Eggs with Homemade Dyes Right From Your Kitchen

How about using common foods and spices in your kitchen to dye your Easter eggs this year? You might be pleasantly surprised by the vibrant colors hiding in your cupboards or freezer. Natural dyes will take a little more time than dying with commercial dyes, but will result in unusual colors from unlikely ingredients. For example, red cabbage leaves produce the most beautiful robin's egg blue and the spice tumeric produces an intense yellow-orange color.

It is fun to explore the possibilities of the foods from your kitchen. All you need is white eggs (for best results), a little white vinegar and a couple of dye sources. A strong cup of coffee yields a dark tan and blueberries produce a purple-blue. If you wish to have a warmer color, try red raspberries for a soft shade of light pink, and for a deep yellow-orange soak eggs in turmeric spice. Even the potent spice chili powder can dye eggs orange. Boiled carrot greens produce a greenish-yellow and boiled beets will produce a deep pink. If your kids won't eat boiled spinach, use it to produce a green dye.

These are just some ideas to get you started. Be adventurous — try other spices or teas and explore the possibilities of the colors they have to offer. If you want to decorate the surface of your eggs with patterns and designs, use rubber bands, crayons and a sponge. Eggs will not dye where covered with rubber bands and the color of the crayon will be enhanced by the dye. You can use the sponge to add texture to the surface once you pull the egg from the container of dye.

There are two methods you can use to dye your Easter eggs with natural sources. Eggs can either be dyed as they are boiled, or first hard boiled then soaked in dye baths. The latter approach produces more intense colors because eggs are soaked in the dye for a longer time.

Add the dye material and about a teaspoon of white vinegar to the pot before beginning to boil your water and before adding your eggs when using the first method. If you would like your eggs darker, keep the liquid used to hard boil, and allow it to cool, continue to soak your eggs in the refrigerator.

If you are dyeing hard-boiled eggs, mix up your dye baths separately and submerge the egg in the dye liquid. Be sure to do all the soaking in the refrigerator, if you intend to eat the eggs. I suggest limiting the soak time to 12 hours because colors will begin to get muddy rather than a deeper shade. Use your own judgment on how much dye material to use when making your dye bath. The more dye material you use, the darker the shade. Add enough water to cover the dye material and the eggs, and one teaspoon of white vinegar for every cup of water.

In both methods you need to be sure the dye bath covers the entire egg. The colors produced by natural sources will not be shiny. For a shiny surface, rub the eggs with cooking oil after eggs are dry. Wow the Easter bunny and your family with the colors of your beautifully dyed eggs.

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