

Dyed Brown Eggs for Easter



Dye Brown Eggs for Easter? Yes You Can!

With brown egg shells as a base Easter Egg dyes are more vibrant

Just before Easter a few years ago a mother I know lamented having to go to the grocery store to buy a dozen eggs. Their family kept their own flock of backyard chickens at the time, but they'd only ever seen white shelled eggs dyed for the Easter holiday and since all of their birds produced brown shelled eggs she was under the impression there was no way around buying supermarket eggs for her kids to dye – no matter how much she despised doing so.

Since then I've run into countless families in similar predicaments, both those with their own laying chickens and those who buy their

eggs from small farms with brown egg laying chickens. The truth is however, brown-shelled eggs dye beautifully.

The darker base of brown-shelled eggs result in deeper and more vibrant eggs; a basket of dyed brown eggs is striking. So much so that now, several years since the first time we dyed them ourselves, I can't imagine decorating my Easter table with anything else.

And the best part is that, as with white eggs, brown eggs can be dyed using all natural dyeing materials – no harsh chemicals or store-bought kits required.

Remember that, by layering colors, only a few dyes are needed for making virtually endless color possibilities. Dipping an egg in a vibrant blue dye bath made from blueberry juice after having soaked it in a red bath made from beets, for instance, results in a

striking purple egg. Likewise, layering red dye over the brilliant yellow hue that can be achieved with a turmeric dye bath ultimately leaves the egg a deep orange color.

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Old Time Wisdom:

Making Natural Dyes

From blueberries to beets to onion skins and red wine, everyday household materials can make wonderful dyes for easter eggs. All you need are your dye materials – see page 2 for suggestions – water and a splash of vinegar.

In a small stockpot cover your dye materials with water. Bring to a rolling boil and maintain until water reaches desired depth of color. Strain into a mug or bowl, discarding dye materials. Add a splash of vinegar – 1 TBSP or more – to help the dye adhere. Have fun!

Choosing Colors

Not sure what to use to make natural dyes? Here's a handy list of options:

1. Blue

Blueberries and their juice are the number one choice for making blue dyes. Some grape juice and wines also work though.

2. Red

Our favorite red – a deep, vibrant dye – comes from beets. In fact, I once read about a woman who dyed an old sofa with beet juice, creating an interesting new centerpiece for her family's living room. Red onion skins, deep red wines, and chili powder are alternate options.

3. Yellow

I've yet to find a yellow dye that can compare with the deep, goldenrod like hue of one made with turmeric, but that hasn't stopped me from trying. Coffee grounds, tea and yellow onion skins are materials I've used in that quest.

4. Purple, Orange, Green and Beyond

One of the very best part of using natural dyes is in the layering process. By layering colors from even just the three primary colored dyes mentioned above you can come up with almost infinite color possibilities.

For a deep, sultry purple allow your eggs to soak in the red dye bath first, followed by a long soak in the blue dye bath. Or, if a more brilliant, pinkish purple is what you're after simply reverse the order – soak the egg in blue first, red second.

Orange and green, likewise can be made by soaking the eggs first in either red for orange or blue for green followed by yellow.

And for pink eggs use the red dye bath, just removed the eggs sooner.

Above all, have fun and don't be afraid to think outside the box!

New Hampshire Reds, such as this one, and other heritage breed chickens may be healthier than their Cornish Cross counterparts



Hybrid v. GMO - Understanding the Difference

Several summers ago small farmers started to notice an interesting phenomenon; more and more customers were coming stands, asking farmers if their produce was "Heirloom or Hybrid" and, if the farmer answered 'Hybrid', immediately leaving without another word. It wasn't until the behavior escalated in almost direct proportion to the amount of negative press genetically modified organisms (GMOs) received that anyone really realized what was happening; people were – and still are – increasingly confusing hybrids and GMOs, two types of produce that are only as similar as apples and oranges.

But what is the difference? It's actually pretty simple to understand and we only need to go as far as the closest dictionary to get an idea.

To be 'genetically modified' by its very definition is to contain genetic information that has been artificially altered to produce a desired result. The key word in that definition being 'artificial'. GMOs contain genetic information that is produced and inserted under laboratory settings. Often the genetic material is consider interspecies. That is, derived from an entirely different species of organism, sometimes an entirely different genus. And is usually inserted using bacteria or viruses.

A hybrid, on the other hand, is simply a mixture, the offspring of two different types of plants – two varieties of tomatoes, for instance. Unlike GMOs which are created in labs, hybrids can occur naturally right in your backyard garden and are simply the product of selective breeding in plants much like we would selectively breed our poultry and pigs to produce the best offspring we can.

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Chickens: Does Breed Affect Nutrition Content?

At least one preliminary study recently released by the ALBC and Good Shepherd Poultry Ranch is saying yes. Small differences in the nutrition content were identified amongst several different breeds of dual purpose heritage chickens including the two breeds in our current flock – Black Australorps and New Hampshire Reds – as well as when heritage bred chickens were compared with both supermarket and independently grown Cornish Cross meat chickens.

Heritage chickens tended to be slightly higher in some vitamins and showed propensity for lower saturated fat concentration.

We'll be watching further developments as more chickens are processed and tested for nutrition information. In the meantime, check out our blog for the full study details and our reaction to them.

Recipe of the Month

This recipe, 'Bacon Cabbage Home Fries', was originally found in a *Everyday with Rachel Ray Magazine* and quickly became one of our favorite quick, easy go-to meals. It makes a big pot; enough to feed a family of four dinner and leftovers for lunch the next day and is one of those dishes that gets better in the refrigerator overnight.

1/2 lb Thick Cut Bacon
4 lg Baking Potatoes
Garlic
1 small head Cabbage
Fresh Ground Pepper

Cut bacon and potatoes into small, bite-sized squares. Shred cabbage coarsely.

In large pot cook bacon over med-high heat until done, just crispy around edges. Drain most of bacon grease.

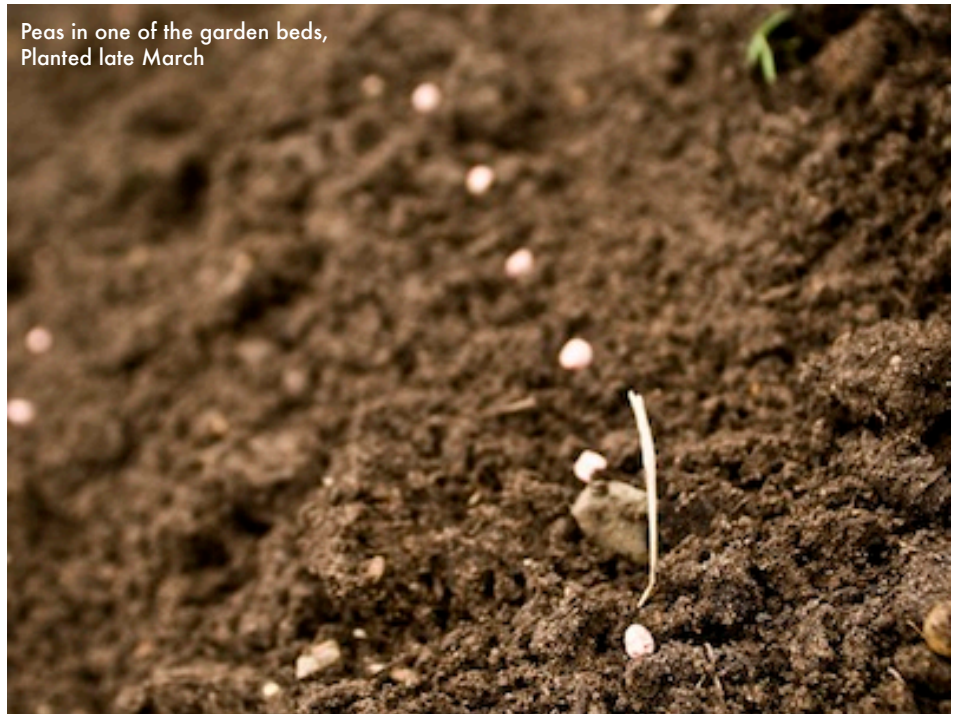
Add potatoes and garlic "to taste". Continue cooking, stirring frequently to prevent sticking, until potatoes are tender.

Add cabbage and water and continue stirring, pressing cabbage into the pot as you stir. Cook until cabbage has begun to wilt, but has not lost all crunchiness.

Add pepper to taste. Serve.

Enjoy!

Peas in one of the garden beds,
Planted late March



What We're Growing Now

On St. Patrick's Day, the traditional day for planting peas and potatoes, our ground was still frozen solid and in plenty of places, covered in snow and ice. It wasn't until several days later that we were able to plant anything and even then, it was just a bed of peas. March was not nearly as cooperative this year as it was last, at least not for garden endeavors. And at least the first half of April isn't looking too terribly promising either.

Still, we have managed to get some things in the ground – that bed of peas we mentioned above, a bed and a half of turnips, three new rhubarb crowns and some of spring's old standbys, greens are all started outside. And inside it gets even better. Beneath the grow lights we are tending more than two-hundred tomato plants, more than seventy pepper plants, a healthy tray of eggplant, another of cabbage, and a handful of both lavender and peanuts. The latter of which is this year's official garden experiment.

By the end of the month we also expect beets, carrots, more greens and peas, asparagus roots, potatoes and garlic to be ready to set up shop outside.

Hybrid v. GMO *continued*

In simple terms you can think of hybrid plants as a mutt dog – a Labradoodle, for instance – while GMOs would be more akin to a cat crossed with a dog – a cog? a dat?

Purposefully grown hybrids have been around as long as gardens and gardeners themselves. And can play an important part in a productive farm as often they're more disease resistant – requiring less chemical and even organic sprays for treatment – and prolific. So much so that buying seed yearly – one of hybrid varieties only downfall is that their seed is not stable, if saved and planted they may not produce the same type of fruit the next year - is usually a small price to pay for the dependability and peace of mind they give small farmers and backyard gardeners alike.

So, as you get ready to head to the farm stands and markets this spring and summer keep these simple definitions in mind. While you may choose to avoid GMOs, they are not one in the same with hybrids. In fact, while there are hybrid varieties of almost every common garden vegetable, GMOs are much harder to come by. All of those once available to large farms – such as the GMO tomato of a few years back – have been discontinued and there is no news of more development anywhere on the immediate horizon. Unless you're buying grains – soy, corn, wheat, canola; or soon the field crop, alfalfa – or foods that contain one of the above there is no risk of GMO contamination. And even then most small farmers don't buy seed in the quantities you would find GMO seed sold in.