

## Take Hard-Boiled Approach to Eggs

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If an Easter egg hunt is on your calendar for the holiday weekend, follow these tips for safe, quality hard cooked eggs. Dr. Amy Simonne, University of Florida/IFAS Food Safety Specialist, recommends choosing Grade A or AA eggs with clean, uncracked shells. Store eggs in the carton in the main compartment of the refrigerator, not the door, to maintain freshness. It is not necessary to wash eggs before coloring but inspect and discard any that are unclean, cracked, broken, or leaking.

To prepare hard cooked eggs, place eggs in a single layer in a saucepan. Add enough tap water to cover eggs by at least one inch. Cover and quickly bring just to boiling. Turn off heat and, if necessary, remove the pan from the burner to prevent further boiling. Let eggs stand, covered, in the hot water about 18 minutes for extra-large eggs, 15 minutes for large eggs, and 12 minutes for medium eggs. Immediately run cold water over eggs or place them in iced water until completely cooked. To remove shell, crackle it by tapping gently all over. Roll egg between hands to loosen shell. Peel, starting at the large end. Hold egg under running cold water or dip in a bowl of water to help ease off the shell. Eggshells usually come off much more easily, without tearing the whites, when they are in small pieces rather than large chunks. Very fresh eggs may be difficult to peel. The fresher the egg, the more the shell membrane clings to the shell. For best results, buy and refrigerate eggs seven to ten days before hard cooking. This brief “breather” allows the eggs to take in air, which helps separate the membrane from the shell.

When coloring eggs, use only food-grade dyes or natural color from vegetables such as beets, cranberries, and blueberries. Hard-cooked eggs will keep in the refrigerator for one week. Like leftover turkey at Thanksgiving, colored eggs are great for sandwiches, either sliced or in egg salad.

Since eggs receive a lot of handling during a hunt, cracks are common. This allows bacteria from hands and the hiding places to seep through the shell, contaminating the inside. After the hunt, discard any with cracked shells. Discard also any eggs that have been out of the refrigerator for more than two hours. Re-refrigerate the “found” eggs until they are eaten. To reduce the risk of foodborne illness, consider coloring one batch for hunting and another for eating. An even safer option is to use plastic eggs for your hunt. For more fun, add a candy or trinket surprise inside each egg.

Ukrainian Easter eggs are decorated egg shells in which the contents of the egg has been blown out through a tiny hole in the shell. Since some raw eggs may contain salmonella, use caution when preparing these eggs for decorating. Use only eggs that have been kept refrigerated and are uncracked. Make sure hands and utensils are clean. To kill bacteria that may be present on the outside of the egg, wash the egg in hot water and then rinse in a solution of one to two teaspoons of bleach to a half cup of water. After removing egg contents, refrigerate immediately and use within a day or freeze for later use. Be sure to thoroughly cook the eggs.

Be careful when preparing dishes calling for raw eggs. Many recipes for bunny-shaped cakes call for using a raw egg white in the frosting. However, this poses a risk for salmonella food poisoning. To be safe, use a frosting recipe that uses hot syrup and egg white. If the egg white mixture reaches 160 degrees F on a thermometer, it should be safe. You also may be able to use a pasteurized powdered meringue available where cake decorating supplies are sold.

*Egg Tips for Easter*, Muriel Turner, University of Florida/IFAS Extension.

If you have a question, write to Judy Corbus, Family and Consumer Sciences Extension Agent, University of Florida/IFAS Washington and Holmes Counties Extension, 1424 Jackson Avenue, Suite A, Chipley, FL 32428; or call the Extension Office, (850) 638-6265, (TDD, via University of Florida, 352-846-1046) between 8 a.m. to noon or 1 to 5 p.m. weekdays.

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