

by Connie J. Magoffin

Naturally Dyed Easter Eggs

In April, 1977 I wrote in this column about dyeing Easter eggs with natural dyes. For two reasons I would like to, again, share that information with you. First, there are probably many new Weaver readers who may like to experiment with this technique now that Easter is almost here. Secondly, I have read more articles on the subject and have experimented further with both dyes and techniques. I thought of all this as a bit of fun, something different, until I recently read a book with recipes for hyperactive children which eliminated, among other things, all artificial colorings and flavorings. Natural dyes were recommended not only for coloring these children's Easter eggs, but for any circumstance that might require food colorings.

Egg preparation:

1. Wash eggs in cool water with a bit of soap. Rinse well and dry.
2. Materials for patterning:
 - a. Resist:
 - 1.) Leaves or small flowers or petals.
 - 2.) Rubber bands of varying widths.
 - 3.) Nylon net, hairnet, onion bag, etc.
 - 4.) Gummed reinforcements or self stick labels (premade dots, hearts, whatever, or large labels can be cut into shapes of your own choice.)
 - 5.) Beeswax, a la Ukrainian egg technique.
 - 6.) I imagine children could use the trusty white crayon to create delightful wax resist patterns.

b. After dyeing, designs can be scratched into the egg with a sharp object to expose the white surface underneath.

3. To fix pattern making materials on the egg:

- a. Leaf or whatever is centered on a 4" square of nylon stocking and it is gently but firmly stretched around the egg and tied at the bottom with a string or thread.
- b. The nylon is also used to keep self stick labels in place.
- c. The rubber bands are merely stretched in place.
- d. A netting pattern is created by tying net fabric tightly around egg.
- e. A method for creating extraordinary marbled eggs is to overlap wetted onion skins over the entire surface of the egg (ferns or flowers may be placed underneath). Either tightly wind sewing thread over the skins to hold them in place or hold skins in place by tying a square of nylon stocking or netting around the egg. Cook eggs for 15-20 minutes. Unwrapping the egg is like Christmas! When oiled, these eggs are so beautiful, my family hates to eat them.
- f. Of course, plain colored naturally dyed eggs are also beautiful.

To prepare the dye baths:

1. Dyes: I am recommending only those dyes that I feel will give you a variety of dye colors easily and successfully.
 - a. Brown onion skins for rust-browns. Use equal amounts of skins and water to start, the more skins you use the darker the color you will obtain.
 - b. Red cabbage for robin's egg blue. One-fourth of a med. cabbage easily dyed a half dozen eggs.
 - c. Coffee for light browns or tans. I brewed a strong cup of coffee.
 - d. Turmeric for yellow-golds. I used 1 tbsp. to 1 qt. of water.
 - e. I had minor success with blueberries and spinach. Carrot tops, blackberries, sage, marjoram, grape juice, beet juice, tea, and parsley have also been suggested, however, don't expect too much.
 - f. I had to try cochineal since it was on the approved food color list until sometime in the 60's. Both times I tried it the eggs came out covered with a black slime, but when

scrubbed, a lovely pink emerged. I won't recommend eating these eggs, but if you want a pink color to balance out a centerpiece of naturally dyed eggs, it works very well. I used about 1 tbsp. of cochineal.

2. For best results use an enamel, stainless steel or glass pan.
3. Add chopped dye material to water and simmer gently (to avoid evaporation cover pot) for approximately 20-40 min. Strain out and discard material.
4. Add 1 tbsp vinegar for a quart of dye bath.

Dyeing:

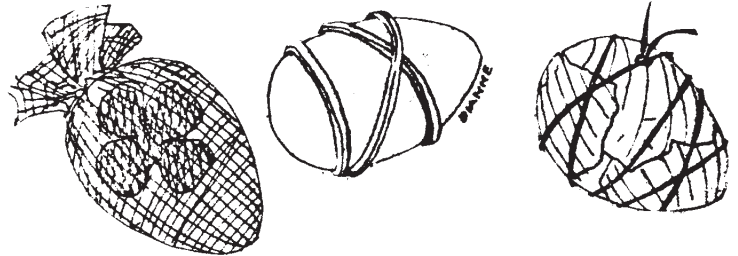
1. Gently lower prepared eggs into dye bath and simmer uncovered for about 20 minutes. This, of course, also cooks the eggs.
2. Rinse eggs in cool water.
3. Unwrap and remove any decorations.
4. Store in refrigerator.
5. Steeping eggs overnight in these baths produces darker colors. However, be sure to cool eggs and baths separately, then refrigerate eggs in baths overnight for safe eating!
5. To avoid melting the wax, when I used the wax resist technique I put the raw waxed eggs in a cold dye bath and steeped them overnight as above. These eggs were not for eating, however, I suspect cooked white eggs could be waxed and dyed this way for eating.
6. I tried top dyeing while I was in the swing of this whole thing. Turmeric yellow over red cabbage blue came out a blue-green. I dyed a cochineal pink egg and waxed a design with beeswax and a fine stylus, then steeped it in turmeric overnight. The turmeric removed the pink resulting in a yellow egg with pink designs.

Additional notes:

1. Wax patterns are removed by holding the egg against a candle flame, wiping the melted wax away with a soft cloth or tissue.
2. When eggs are dry, you may want to rub them with salad oil, and buff for a beautiful lustre.
3. I varnished or painted an acrylic medium over those eggs I wanted to keep for decorations (or until they are dropped).
4. Sometimes the flowers or leaves you use may impart their own color to the egg surface. Be sure they are not poisonous!

And be careful not to use poisonous plants for dyes. Use only those you are absolutely sure are edible.

Although you may obtain bright colors from some of these dyes, we are not trying to duplicate Easter egg dyeing kits. Some colors are soft and subtle, but just as beautiful. HAPPY EASTER!



Janet Meany has accepted the position of Guild Federation representative. In this capacity, she will act as a liaison with the other Minnesota Guilds. She will send a copy of our newsletter to representatives from other guilds and she will report to us on the activities of the other guilds. Her report will include upcoming workshops and other items which may be of interest or provide our guild and guild members with new ideas. Her address is Janet Meany
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