

## Hard Boiled Tips for Easter and Passover Eggs

Eggs play a key role in religious holidays. If you are planning an Easter egg hunt or cooking eggs for your Passover Seder meal you want to make sure you keep your family safe. Handling eggs at Easter or anytime during the year can provide opportunities for the eggs to become contaminated with bacteria and make people sic.

If you plan to eat the Easter eggs you decorate, be sure to use only food grade dye. Some people make two sets of eggs, one for decorating and hiding and another set for eating. Hard-cooked eggs for Easter and Passover celebrations should be prepared with care.

- Keep fresh eggs refrigerated until it's time to cook them. Eggs are a potentially hazardous food. That falls in the same category as meats. They are high in protein, they have a high moisture content and low acid and therefore if handled improperly it can be unsafe. They are capable of supporting the rapid growth of disease causing bacteria such as Salmonella.
- Prepare eggs safely. The American Egg Board recommends this method for boiling the perfect Easter egg: Place eggs in single layer in a saucepan. Add enough tap water to become at least one inch above eggs. A tablespoon of vinegar can be added to allow better dye coverage after cooking. Cover pan and quickly bring just to boil. Turn off heat. If necessary, remove pan from burner to prevent further boiling. Let eggs stand, covered in the hot water 15 minutes. Immediately run cold water over the eggs or place them in ice water until completely cooled. Refrigerate all hard cooked eggs and use within 3 to 4 days.
- Eggs should always be cooked well. The Food and Drug Administration recommends cooking eggs until both the yolk and the white are firm, not runny. This way any Salmonella or other harmful bacteria that may be in the eggs will be destroyed.
- Do not handle eggs excessively, and wash your hands thoroughly when you do handle them, whether cooking, cooling, dyeing or hiding. The shell of an egg is very porous and will permit bacteria to penetrate. Most commercial egg producers lightly coat their eggs with a thin spray coating of mineral oil to close the pores against contamination. Cooking the egg in the shell, however, removes the barrier so that your hard cooked eggs are again prone to contamination unless you protect them by proper handling.
- For an Easter egg hunt avoid cracking the egg shells. If the shells crack then bacteria could enter and contaminate the eggs.
- Care should be used in choosing hiding places for Easter eggs. Make sure to avoid areas where the eggs might come into contact with dirt, pets, wild animals, birds, snakes, insects or lawn chemicals.
- Some egg suppliers offer pre-cooked Easter eggs, decorated or plain, that are resin coated for extra protection against contamination. The resin coating also doubles the eggs' shelf life so that they will keep for two weeks instead of one.

- The total time for hiding and hunting eggs should be no more than two hours. Then be sure to refrigerate the found eggs right away until you eat them. Eggs found hours later or the next day should be thrown out and not eaten.
- Eggs also play an important role on the Seder plate during Passover celebrations. If that egg sits out at room temperature for more than two hours, it should not be eaten. Since the hard-cooked eggs that are usually served to each person as part of the special dinner are meant to be eaten, keep those hard-cooked eggs in the refrigerator until ready to serve.

Sources: American Egg Board, USDA, National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA)