

## *Easter Eggs and Food Safety!*

By

Carolyn Hendry Wyatt, Extension Agent III, Family & Consumer Science/4-H

Eggs and Easter—they just go together! Brightly colored eggs dyed blue, red, green, yellow, orange, purple, and every color in between have been part of the Easter tradition for years. Many adults and children alike enjoy participating in Easter egg hunts during this season of the year. It becomes part of a spring celebration in many communities and towns around the country. Many parents and grandparents enjoy planning family Easter egg hunts for their children and grandchildren. It is a way for families to get together to have fun and socialize during the Easter season.

If you plan to eat your decorated eggs, you should observe food handling precautions ahead of time. For safety's sake, wash hands thoroughly before handling eggs at every stage in the process—cooking, cooling, dyeing and hiding. Be sure to refrigerate eggs, in their cartons, as much as possible between steps. Do not color or hide cracked eggs, and when coloring eggs, use water warmer than the eggs.

You should plan **not** to eat cracked eggs or eggs which have been out of refrigeration for more than 2 to 6 hours. So, if you are planning to use colored eggs as decoration or for a centerpiece, where the eggs will be out of refrigeration for many hours or several days, you should prepare extra eggs and simply discard them after they have served their purpose. Eggs which have been refrigerated as much as possible throughout the process should be used within a week.

Egg salad is probably the most popular use for post-Easter eggs and it lends itself to almost unlimited possibilities. Have you ever considered these options? Instead of mayonnaise, moisten with bottled salad dressing, sour cream, yogurt, pureed cottage cheese or softened cream cheese thinned with milk. Season with 'most any herb or spice from your cupboard. Then, spread on bagels, rolls, crackers, English muffins, tortillas or even waffles!

Get crazy and stir in apples or avocados, chili peppers or cheese, pickles or pimienta, water chestnuts or watercress. Scoop egg salad into pineapple boats or patty shells, baked potatoes or pita pockets, tomato cups or large pasta shells. Fold in cooked pasta, diced potatoes or rice to make a main-dish salad or hot casserole.

Deviled eggs are another age-old use for hard-cooked eggs. Here's how to make them with no muss, no fuss, no bowl and no spoon! Simply cut eggs in half and place the

yolks into a sealable, plastic food storage bag. Add mayonnaise, seasonings, and any other ingredients you choose to use. Seal the bag and knead until the mixture is well blended. Then, cut off one corner of the bag and squeeze the yolk mixture back into the egg white halves. Discard the bag and your clean-up is done! Some inventive cooks place deviled eggs atop cooked noodles or rice and top with sauce for a quick and delicious main dish.

Creamed eggs are another timeless hard-cooked egg creation. They make an especially inexpensive dinner dish that comes in handy when “the cupboard is bare”. Most any combination of cheeses, vegetables and seasonings can be added to a basic white sauce, with eggs contributing high-quality protein. Creamed eggs can be served over split biscuits, toast slices, noodles or cornbread.

So, you see, your cache of decorated, hard-cooked eggs doesn't have to end up in sandwich after sandwich. Let them do double duty, use your imagination and make your egg salad anything you want it to be! Remember to practice the food safety guidelines when handling your eggs. For more information on safe food handling, call the Hardee County Extension Office at 863-773-2164.