

REYNOLDA

Dyeing Eggs with Red Cabbage

Project

Create your own egg dye from a natural material, and then use plant leaves to add an extra decoration.

Samples



Inspiration

While we don't know many details, we know that the Reynolds family celebrated Easter. In 1911, the two oldest Reynolds children (then ages 5 and 2 ½) "hosted" an Easter egg hunt at their home in downtown Winston-Salem. Children looked for eggs in the family conservatory (like a greenhouse) among the plants. The Reynolds used decorations of miniature rabbits and chicks, a theme we still find in Easter decorations today! If you had been invited to this Easter egg hunt, you would have left with a little basket of Easter eggs!

Candy played a role in Easter celebrations in the 1910s just as it does today. When the Reynolds' children's governess, Bum, was working away from Reynolda in the spring of 1921, she sent them candy for Easter. You can read a postcard she wrote to young Mary Reynolds (then twelve and a half) [here](#). (Note: at the end of the postcard, Bum asks if they have started to rehearse for the play based on a poem called "Hiawatha." The play was held May 25, 1921 and you can find a digitized photo album from the production in the Wake Forest University library, [here](#).)

Easter Egg Hunt Given.

A most charming Easter egg hunt was given yesterday afternoon by Master Richard Reynolds and little Miss Mary Katherine Reynolds at the home of their parents, Mr. and Mrs. R. J. Reynolds on West Fifth street.

The little guests were invited into the conservatory which was filled with most beautiful flowers and in them were hid many lovely eggs. Nestled among the flowers and palms were lots of attractive rabbits and dear little chickens. After a most delightful time was spent with the children hunting for the eggs, each little guest was given a dainty little basket filled with glass and pretty Easter eggs.

Winston-Salem Journal, Saturday, April 15, 1911, page 3

When young Mary Reynolds grew up and had her own children, they would dye Easter eggs. Mary's daughter Barbara remembers that they probably used kits for dye, like many people do today. While you can use a kit to get bright, vibrant colors, you can also have fun creating your own egg dyes out of natural materials, like red cabbage or onion skins.

Vocabulary

Dye: Dye is a natural or synthetic substance used to change the color of something.

Natural dye: Natural dyes are dyes made from plants, insects or minerals.

Materials

- Red cabbage, shredded (1 cup per 1 cup of water)
- Vinegar (1 Tbsp per 1 cup of water)
- Stainless steel saucepan
- Colander or slotted spoon
- Water and measuring cup
- Timer
- Uncooked eggs; white eggs will show the dye color most vibrantly; brown eggs will darken
- Paper towel and olive or vegetable oil
- *Optional:* pantyhose cut into about 6 inch squares, twist ties, small leaves
- Children will need an adult to help with shredding and cooking the cabbage.

For other ways of making natural dyes, see [these recipes](#) by Sara Kate Gillingham at thekitchn.com for suggestions.

Process

1. Dice or shred the cabbage.
2. Measure 4 cups of cabbage into a stainless steel saucepan. Add 4 cups of water and 4 Tablespoons of vinegar.
3. Boil the cabbage. Once the cabbage has reached a boil, cover the pot with a lid, turn down the heat, and simmer for **30 minutes**.
4. Let the pot cool for several hours or overnight.
5. Once the dye is cool, strain out the cabbage by pouring it through a colander into another stainless steel pot (stainless steel to avoid staining, or dyeing!, it). If you don't have a colander, remove the cabbage with a slotted spoon. (It's OK if a little bit of cabbage remains in the pot).
6. Prepare your eggs (we were able to dye 8 eggs with 4 cups of cabbage) by washing them and letting them come to room temperature.
7. *Optional:* If you want to decorate your eggs with leaves, collect small, flat leaves from outside. Dip the leaves in water and then place them on the egg (the water helps hold them in place). Then, wrap a square of pantyhose around the egg, pulling it tight. Secure it with a twist tie as close to the egg as you can get it.
8. Place your eggs into the saucepan with your dye. Bring to a boil then turn down to medium or medium low to simmer. Simmer for **20 minutes**.
9. After the eggs have cooked for 20 minutes, turn off the stove and remove the pan from the heat. Pull out one egg with a slotted spoon. If the egg is the color you want it to be, skip to step 11. If not...
10. Let the eggs and dye cool. Once cool, place in the fridge for several hours, until the eggs reach the color you'd like them to be.
11. Remove the eggs from the pot. Dry the eggs with a paper towel. Add a small amount of oil to the egg to give it shine then lightly buff it with a paper towel.

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