

Easter
Family
Fun



Get Outside!

Easter is the springtime holiday, so incorporate the outdoors into your plans.

Here are a few fun family-friendly ideas so that you make the most of warming temps.

EGG SCAVENGER HUNT

Liven up one of Easter's oldest traditions, the egg hunt. Give everyone a particular color or pattern to bring back. Another twist on this old favorite is to put numbers or letters on plastic egg halves, then see who can create the most matching pairs.

BUNNY BOWLING

Arrange store-bought chocolate bunnies in the yard as if they're bowling pins. Use a tennis ball or, if your grass is particularly thick, a baseball as a miniature bowling ball — then see who can knock the most down.

EASTER TREE

Pick a small tree or bush in the yard, and decorate it with homemade ornaments and figures made from construction paper. Top it all off with string, bows, flowers or even strings of lights.

EGG-AND-SPOON RACES

This favorite activity dates back more than a hundred years, and is self explanatory. Participants put an egg in a spoon, then try to balance it as they run. The first person to get to the finish line with their egg still balanced in the spoon wins the race. If you want to make it more interesting (and more

messy!), try unboiled eggs — or small water balloons.

HOW MANY JELLY BEANS

Fill a clear glass or plastic jar with jelly beans, then have family and friends try to guess how many are in there. Whoever gets closest the actual figure gets a special Easter prize.

EGG TOSS

Speaking of messy fun, this one involves tossing a raw egg back and forth. First, divide everyone into two lines that are a set distance apart. Begin tossing with a partner, going back and forth. Take one step backward after each successful egg catch. Keep going until only one duo is left with an intact egg. Plastic eggs are a tidier option. If it's a particularly warm Easter, try small water balloons.

ART PARADE

Have the kids collect their best Easter art or the egg with their favorite design, then hold it up during a small neighborhood parade that anyone can join. A group of older children can serve as judges for the most inventive and most enthusiastic participants.

BUNNY HOP

Pass out pillowcases, then line everyone up for an Easter twist on the old-fashioned bur-lap sack races of your youth. The first bunny to cross the finish line is the winner.



Decorating for Easter

Time for the last of the winter and Christmas-themed decorations to be stored away!

Celebrate Easter and the warming spring months with fresh ideas that incorporate bright colors and fresh foliage.

YOUR HOME

Nothing says spring like flowers. Buy some inexpensive pots, whether plastic or terra cotta, and plant the ones most associated with the season — tulips and daffodils. After they've bloomed, you can transfer the bulbs to your lawn or garden and then enjoy them for many Easters to come. If you're feeling more crafty, consider bringing the outside in by using watering cans or even rain boots as a pot instead. Create a wreath using clothespins or from paper in the remaining Christmas gift bags, then decorate it with fun mementos from around the house. Make a fresh garland from branches and vines to accent any doorway or banister. The aroma will add a touch of warmth to any occasion. Transfer small lawn ornaments to the inside, either as a collection of conversation starters on an end table, or as a cool doorstop.

YOUR TABLE

All of those colored eggs can be reused as a centerpiece for Easter dinner. Arrange them



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by color or shade for a festive touch. They can also be fashioned into place cards at the table, adding a pop of color to everyone's plate. Guests can take them home if they'd like — in particular if you use plastic or wooden eggs. Moss and succulents also make terrific centerpieces for your Easter

celebration. After dinner, transfer these fun items to other rooms in order to bring a touch of spring to your entire home.

YOUR YARD

Spring cleaning includes the outdoors. Remove the last reminders of winter like leaves

and bare branches from the yard, walk way and garden beds. Freshen up your planters with blooming flowers, or consider placing new pots with bright spring colors in high-traffic areas like the entry or back porch. If you don't have your own backyard, take the Easter party to a nearby

park for a cozy picnic. Bring blankets and plush throws in Easter-themed colors. Don't forget that hand tools can serve double duty: Arrange things typically used in the garden like shovels and or a three-pronged cultivator in a bucket for a fresh season-specific decor option.

Inventive Basket Ideas

Easter baskets have become a cottage industry, with versions customized for the recipient's interests. Why not let your inner creativity shine this year and make your own?

Here are some new ideas to help create the perfect hand-made version.

FORGET THE BASKET!

The best way to liven up the Easter basket is to ditch the basket entirely — and it also provides an opportunity to personalize in a way that the traditional woven variety simply can't. Fill up a garden wagon, sand bucket or rain boot. Decorate them for the season, or to match someone's favorite hobby, sports team or band. If you have a large group of cousins and friends coming over, consider filling the kiddie pool with goodies instead. Or turn over an umbrella; you'll also have something you can reuse for those April showers. For the hardier types, consider a dump-truck Easter basket, or a baseball hat.

EASTER EGG BOUQUET

Here's a cool twist on the traditional floral bouquet: Place a circle of eggs along the bottom of the basket, then create layers of eggs above them with skewers or wooden rods of different heights. Artificial grass or complementary Easter-colored tissue completes the look. If you'd like to add another wrinkle, use plastic eggs on the first level, and fill them with scavenger-hunt clues or miniature gifts. Fill out the rest of the basket with personal items that complete the visual package. The best part about crafting is that the love and care shines through in every small gesture.

FOOD BASKETS

Visit an area farmers' market to find homegrown food choices, then place them all in a vintage basket that's perfect for the season. Choose fruits, vegetables and other locally grown items that boast bright colors to give the basket an Easter-appropriate appearance. Complete with an assortment of crackers, nuts and cheese to taste — then add some vibrant bows or glittered ribbon to finish everything off in style. Snacks and fresh foods like these can liven up any Easter basket, but remember that these choices should be specifically tailored to your friend or family member's taste.





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Don't Forget the Dessert!

From chocolate bunnies to Peeps, Easter can be all about the sweets.

But that doesn't mean your holiday meal shouldn't include a warm and enjoyable dessert. Here's how to get cooking.

CARROT CAKE

The best part about carrot cake, besides their obvious connection to the Easter bunny, is how few ingredients you really need. Many of them, in fact, are

already tucked away on kitchen shelves. Most recipes call for all-purpose flour, but you can also swap out for gluten-free options. You'll typically also need salt, cinnamon and vanilla extract. Use a neutral-flavored oil, though the more adventurous might substitute melted coconut oil. Either way, this is critical for moistness. Try combining white and brown sugar for more complexity. Hand grate the carrots for more texture; use a food processor for a smoother finish. Whatever you do, don't scrimp on the carrots! If the recipe calls for three cups,

pour them in confidently. Pecans and raisins are, of course, optional.

LEMON COOKIES

Use lemon extract when baking these homemade cookies. Lemon oil is not interchangeable, because it is much more intense. Add the called-for lemon juice directly on top of your baking soda, where it should bubble. That means your baking soda has been activated. If it doesn't foam, the baking soda is expired. Subbing confectioners sugar for the granulated version in your

dough gives the finished product a welcome lightness. Try adding a tablespoon of honey into the dough. It attracts water, which helps your lemon cookies stay denser and softer, without being too cake-y. Use two teaspoons of cornstarch to give them a soft-batch feel. For a more robust flavor, sprinkle your cookies with lemon zest.

CHOCOLATE MARSHMALLOW FONDUE

Not the baking type? Here's a simple way to liven up any Easter, using extra items that are usually around after family

get-togethers.

Ingredients

8 oz. white chocolate
1/2 cup cream
8 large marshmallows
Pretzels or fruit

Directions

Combine the marshmallows, cream and chocolate in a medium saucepan, then place over medium-low heat. Constantly stir the mixture, until the marshmallows and chocolate melt together. Remove from heat and place in a festive bowl — then serve with the fruit and pretzels for dipping.

Mardi Gras Traditions

Mardi Gras precedes Easter as a time of celebration before the Lenten season of fasting and penance.

The name translates from French into “Fat Tuesday,” an annual date which serves as the culmination of the period between the Christian holidays of Epiphany and Ash Wednesday. Most people associate the tradition with New Orleans, where millions of people gather each year to watch extravagant parade. But the Mardi Gras tradition is world-wide in scope, and its American roots aren’t actually in Louisiana.

HISTORY OF THE SEASON

Mardi Gras, or Carnival, is a seasonable celebration passed down from Catholic and Anglican nations in Europe. Its origins are traced to medieval times when pagan rituals relating to planting and spring were held. Mardi Gras arrived in the U.S. after the French Catholic King Louis XIV sent soldiers to defend his country’s claim to the territory of Louisiana, which also included parts of Alabama, Mississippi and Texas. They called it Mardi Gras because the French custom was to use all of the fats in their home before a period of abstinence.

IN OTHER CITIES

The oldest celebration of Mardi Gras in the United States didn’t happen in

Louisiana. Instead, nearby Mobile, Alabama, held the first city-wide holiday — and still celebrates with formal balls and parades of its own. In Brazil, where the holiday is known as Carnival, and has an official length of just five days. Celebrations in Rio de Janeiro are held unofficially for weeks, however, just as they are in Louisiana. In the Czech Republic, it’s known as Masopust. In Germany, they call it Fetter Donnerstag. Swedes refer to the celebration as Fettisdagen. Mardi Gras lasts 15 days in Nice, France, where thousands of flowers are tossed to crowds enjoying moderate temperatures along the French Riviera.

WHAT WE GIVE UP

Lent proceeds after Mardi Gras, beginning annually on Ash Wednesday. It’s a time of sacrifice, but what people choose to give up tends to follow a certain trend rather than varying widely. For instance, a study by Time magazine said more than half gave up some sort of food for Lent — with 24% zeroing in on sweets. Eight percent pledge to go without social media during the period leading up to Easter. Smaller percentages sacrificed things like coffee, dating, makeup or the internet entirely.



Egg Coloring Ideas

Everyone is familiar with the time-honored tradition of vinegar and food coloring when it's time to dye your Easter eggs.

Why not liven things up this year? Just remember to clear the area before starting, since there's bound to be a mess. Create a paper barrier between your coloring ingredients and any countertop — especially if you have one with a porous surface.

TEMPORARY TATTOOS

Here's a quick way to personalize your Easter eggs: Temporary tattoos feature most any design or character, and they provide a nice distraction for kids while dinner preparations continue.

CRAFT PAPER

Cut and paste craft paper to your hard-boiled eggs and they transform into birds, flowers or a bunny. Pre-cut designs for younger children.

CHALKBOARD PAINT

Bored with your egg already? Completely coat it with chalkboard paint to make a reusable surface. Simply erase everything, and then start over. You'll have hours of egg-coloring excitement.

WASHI TAPE

Washi tape resembles masking tape in feel, but is made from natural fibers and comes in an exciting variety of designs. Just affix the tape right to shell. It's durable and fun — and won't create a mess

or stain anything like dyes can.

SCIENCE!

Prepare the usual primary dye options, but then have little ones dip their eggs in multiple bowls to see how they combine into new colors.

TRY MONOCHROMATIC

For a more polished decor idea, experiment with various hues of the same color. Line them up for an ombre effect, or mix and match for a look that's both bold and cohesive.

GO NATURAL

You actually don't have to use dyes at all. Vegetables like beets, blueberries, spinach, red cabbage and dill seeds are natural substitutes. You'll save money, and they actually give eggs a deeper, richer color when you'd done.

BROWN EGGS

The traditional white egg is usually preferred, because it allows the vibrant colors associated with Easter to shine through. Mix in some brown eggs, however, and you'll see a new diversity of shades.

GLITTER

What's more glitzy than glitter? Just be aware that creating this look outside is probably the best idea. Scattered glitter tends to stick around long after the holiday.



Easter Fun Facts

Many people put their own unique twists on Easter, but some traditions are universal.

Here's a fun look at how the holiday is celebrated across the U.S.

TREATS

Studies show that Americans spend billions on Easter candy, making this holiday the second biggest for treats — after Halloween, of course. We will eat more than 16 million jelly beans — enough to circle our planet three times. (Put another way, they could fill a jar the size of a nine-story structure.) Some 70% of purchased Easter candy is chocolate. The first chocolate eggs were made in 19th century Europe. Today, Cadbury makes more than 1.5 million creme eggs a day at its Bournville fac-

tory in England — and an astounding 500 million a year. If you piled up their annual production of these Easter treats, they would be taller than Mount Everest. More than 75% of Americans think you should start with the ears when eating a chocolate bunny.

EGGS AND BASKETS

Eggs are a symbol of fertility, and have long been associated with spring. Baskets are more than a utilitarian way to collect eggs; they represent the nests that serve as a cradle for new life. The first mention of a rabbit hiding eggs arrived in 1680. (Dutch settlers who landed in Pennsylvania brought the bunny tradition stateside in the 1700s.) Nearly 80% of Americans are said to dye or color eggs, and most of them hunt for eggs, too. Nearly 80% put together or buy Easter baskets, the National Confectioners Association reports.

HISTORY

Easter falls on the first Sunday after the full moon on March 21 (the traditional start date of spring) or thereafter. This Christian holiday was named after Eostre, the Anglo-Saxon goddess of fertility, dawn and light. She was honored at festivals held each spring, highlighting the modern-day blending of pagan traditions and Christian holidays. Springtime is also associated with rebirth, which dovetails with Christian history.

Pretzels were once part of the Easter tradition, because the twists were said to resemble two arms that are crossing in prayer.

About 60% of U.S. citizens will visit family and friends this Easter, according to the National Retail Federation. Most of them will eat ham, in a tradition that dates back to the days when the winter-time curing process would culminate around this time of the year.