

Candymaker lends Easter bunny a helping hand

BY SUZANNE KEENE

ELIZABETHTOWN — For the past several weeks Arlene Martin of Elizabethtown has been spending most of her time in the kitchen creating chocolate bunnies, baskets, peeps and eggs that will satisfy the needs of many Easter bunnies who are too busy to make their own candy.

Arlene said she has worn out two mixers and produced thousands and thousands of creamy peanut butter and coconut creme eggs in the 13 years since she started making candy.

Experience has taught her that chocolate heated to the proper temperature and good weather conditions are essential to successful candymaking.

"Weather has an awful lot to do with it," Arlene explained. "Your humidity has to be down."

On muggy or rainy days the chocolate tends to crack, Arlene said. Because of this, Arlene stops her candymaking around the end of June or the beginning of July and doesn't resume production until September, she said.

Heating the chocolate to the proper temperature is also essential in producing good candy. Arlene said that before she leaves on her morning bus run, she heats water in the bottom of a double boiler until it just reaches the boiling point. She then reduces the heat to 150°F and places the candy melts in the top of the double boiler to melt.

When she returns from her bus run, the chocolate is ready to use. To keep it warm while she works, Arlene said she keeps the chocolate in the double boiler on the stove at the warm setting or at about 150 or 250°F. To heat a number of colors at the same time, Arlene fills her electric fry pan about half full of water, sets the temperature at 150 or 200°F. and sets jars of candy melts in the warm water.

"Never go over 200°F." Arlene advised. If the chocolate gets too hot it becomes thick and will not mold properly, she explained.

If the chocolate does become too thick, Arlene said she occasionally uses paramont crystals, which act as a thinner. However, Arlene said, she doesn't like to use them very much because she prefers using natural ingredients in all her chocolate.

No water or steam must touch the chocolate either, Arlene continued, because moisture causes the chocolate to turn white.

Keeping the candy molds clean and water free is also important to producing attractive candy, Arlene said. She said she washes



Arlene spoons chocolate into bunny molds that will later be placed in the freezer to harden.

her molds in warm water and stores them in a vertical position in a cool place. If the molds get too hot they will become deformed and will not fit together properly, she explained. Soap can also harm the molds by taking off the shiny coating on them.

When the chocolate is melted and the molds ready, Arlene pours the chocolate into the mold. If the mold requires special decorations or several colors, Arlene paints them in with a small paint brush and puts them in the freezer to solidify before pouring the main part of the mold.

To create a hollow bunny or egg, Arlene said she fills one half of the mold with chocolate, then clamps the two halves together and distributes the chocolate evenly in the mold. Air bubbles can be removed by gently tapping the mold against the counter, Arlene said. When this is done, Arlene puts the mold in her freezer for about two or three minutes to solidify. Solid chocolate molds take several minutes longer, she explained.

The candy is ready to be removed from the mold when it falls out easily, Arlene said.

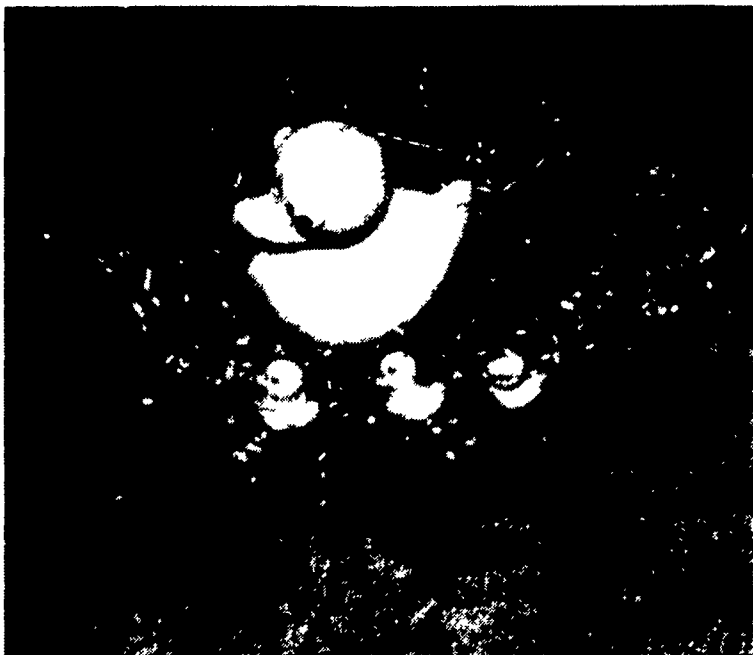
(Turn to Page B16)



Arlene Martin molds peanut butter eggs, something she has done a lot of during the past several weeks.



Jars of colored candy melts are kept at the proper temperature in an electric fry pan filled with water and set at 150°F.



This set of yellow candy ducks is just one of the many Easter items Arlene creates with her extensive set of candy molds.

