

On Being a Farm Wife
(and other hazards)
Joyce Bupp



This package came as a surprise

A return address from Louisiana immediately gave away the identity of the senders, friends who had moved there a few years ago from their home in another distant state. Inside the box was an assortment of items representative of their regional "cajun" foods: spicy seasoning, mixes of "dirty rice" and jambalaya, a can of tomatoes with chilies, instant coffee with chicory, and a large bottle of Tabasco sauce hot enough to season us for eternity.

What a delightful treat! In an effort to return the favor, I've been polling friends and family on what items might

be gathered into a reciprocatory sort of thank-you box showcasing traditional "Pennsylvania Dutch" culture. Among the suggestions have been whoopie pies, egg noodles, apple butter, hard pretzels, chowchow, shoofly pie. Even hogmaw. Which we decided would be near-impossible to ship and confound the dickens out of the recipients.

You eat WHAT from a pig? Oh, and a hex sign. For good luck

With the Easter holiday season upon us, what could be a more appropriate food than a traditional Pennsylvania Dutch pickled redbeet egg? But how in the world would one send them, short of packing those treats in

dry ice. And would redbeet eggs be any less baffling to the uninitiated than dining on a hog stomach?

As a kid, Easter and pickled redbeet eggs were synonymous. Sometimes during the week before Easter, Mom would hard-boil a big kettle of eggs. We kids would gather round the kitchen table covered with newspaper for safety, based on the premise that at least one of us would manage to spill one of those little prone-to-tip, individual bottles of egg dye. We would emerge from the effort with a basketful of crazy-quilt-colored eggs, splotchy-colored fingers, soggy newsprint from where we had spilled the requisite bottle of dye and probably enough mess to make Mom grateful Easter only came once a year.

(When I couldn't find any a few weeks ago, a good friend tracked down for me some of those packs of Easter egg dye in little bottles to ship west for our grandsons. Their Oregon neighborhood stores carry only the dip-and-dunk kinds.)

After coloring came the fun of

hiding the eggs, hunting the eggs, occasionally losing, breaking or sharing an egg with the dogs. Ultimately, though, some of them would emerge as delicious redbeet eggs, peeled, hard-boiled easter eggs swimming in bright red-purple juice in company with slices of pickled beets.

A more logical choice to ship to our Louisiana friends might be onion-skin-dyed eggs. These, too, must have Pennsylvania Dutch roots; most folks have never heard of the warm-brown-colored Easter symbols. Again, Mom made these each Easter, using the accumulation of papery-dry onion skins which had accumulated during their storage over the winter.

The way Mom made these resulted in a sort of very humble cousin to the intricately-colored psanky eggs of Russian culture. Both are decorated using wax, the psanky eggs taking numer-

ous coats of wax and dye baths, while the onion-skin eggs merely need to be hard-boiled along with the onion skins covered with water. To decorate them, Mom simply took a crayon and drew designs on the raw eggs. As the eggs cooked in the onion-skins, the wax-covered area picked up less of the color, leaving the design idelibly lighter than the warm-brown-dyed surrounding shell.

Perhaps I can blow the contents from a couple of eggs destined for cooking or baking and onion-skin dye them as an example. Or ship hard-boiled ones carefully packed with a Do-Not-Eat! warning.

Sharing traditional foods - at least what can be shipped back and forth - is a delightful way to partake of distant cultures one might not otherwise experience.

We may celebrate Easter with a culture clash; pickled eggs laced with Tabasco

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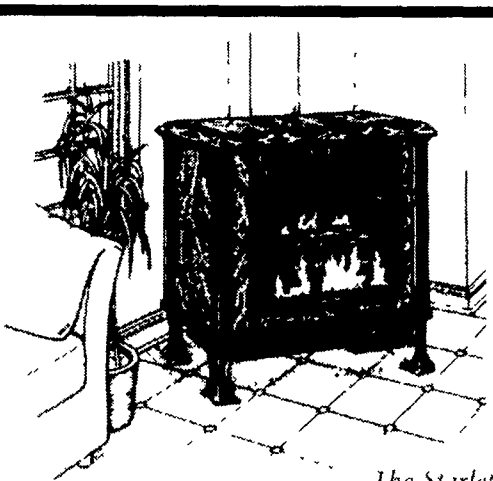
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