



Sobering, but not really unexpected.

That was my gut reaction to a recent news article that many youngsters have developed extensive "gimme" expectations about Easter. Chocolate bunnies and jellybeans nested in plastic straw apparently don't cut it with kids anticipating basketfuls of things like DVD players and in-line skates.

While disappointing, that's not terribly surprising, considering society's tendency to commercialize every holiday.

Fortunately, in many families, ours included, Easter still focuses on church, a family dinner, and egg hunts. In fact, our family egg artists are so "into" egg decorating that they begin practicing their craft shortly after we put away the red Valentine hearts.

Coloring eggs is just plain down "eggs-citing," entertainment.

"Grandma, grandma, we're coloring eggs!" was the enthusiastic greeting on a recent afternoon at the house across the meadow. Three sets of shining eyes glistened at the prospect, lugging empty baskets around in anticipation. A panful of eggs bubbled on the stove, and newspaper covered the dining area table. Derra Dog parked herself beneath it, assured that sooner or

later some fallout from the egg painters would reward her wait.

Easter egg art supplies are much more extensive and fun in recent years. I still usually boil a few eggs with onion skins for tradition's sake. To the kids, those bright brown eggs are boring in contrast to those sporting ornamentation ranging from the traditional small bottles of bright dyes to individual cups of dipping colors to glitter and sticker additions.

And so we begin, balancing the hot eggs in sections of egg carton for stability. Sorta.

The egg artists clutch cotton-tipped swabs in their small hands, busily streaking color across eggs gingerly balanced in the carton holders. Focus is not so much about creativity as it is to see who can do the most, the fastest. Before long, someone decides a swab-painted egg must also be dipped in one of the cups of dipping dye, and then all decide to follow suit.

Soon, it isn't enough to dip in one color. We must try two. So a yellow egg goes into the blue dye, and we get green. A blue goes into the red, for a purple result. Even a red plunked into the yellow give a cheery orange egg.

Do you know what you get when you start mixing them up from there?

An "eggs-traordinarily" muddy-sort of color.

But you can cover that all up with several bunny and chick-shaped stickers. And when the egg proceeds to crash to the floor, as it inevitably does when little hands get to squabbling about who uses what color in what rotation, Derra Dog doesn't care if the color is red or purple or muddy. It's hers.

Grandma gets tapped to fashion items with a clear wax crayon drawn onto the white eggs, which allows the design to show up when the egg is dipped in dye. Ever try to draw a design from clear wax onto a white egg with no outlines to follow? The egg-art

critics are not impressed with the final results.

"Grandma, that doesn't look like a tractor." (How many kids want tractors drawn on their eggs?)

"Grandma, that's not my name!" (The straggly, half-formed letters are pretty unintelligible.)

"Grandma, that doesn't look like a person." (Maybe an "eggs-traterrestrial?")

I finally fashion an invisible wax bunny on the side of an egg that wins half-hearted approval after the dye dunking. Then we craft spotted eggs and striped eggs and one in combination that gets dubbed the "watermelon"

egg. We crash another egg or two onto the floor and a tipped cup of blue dye oozes across the damp, color-streaked paper. They squabble, they share, we laugh together. They are little kids (and big ones) observing together a classic Easter celebration.

No one has asked for a DVD or in-line skates or dolls or trucks or anything of such major proportions. Thank goodness. There is one additional request.

"This is fun! Can we color some more?" Which is eggs-actly what Easter celebrations are supposed to be about.

May you and yours have a happy and blessed one!

Keep Eye On Water Levels Online

UNIVERSITY PARK (Centre Co.) — With the worsening drought causing wells to go dry across the state, a water resources extension specialist in Penn State's College of Agricultural Sciences recommends that well owners use the Internet to keep tabs on groundwater levels.

"Droughts such as the one we are now experiencing can be especially stressful for the three million rural residents who rely on private wells," says Bryan Swistock.

In addition to the actual water levels, the site (http://pa.water.usgs.gov/durplots/well_duration.html) shows shaded areas to illustrate the normal groundwater levels as well as drought watch, warning and emergency levels.

There are other resources on the Internet, Swistock points out, that include information on drought, water supplies, water conservation and private well management. Some are:

- U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (<http://www.epa.gov>). Publications on water quality, private wells and conservation.

- The Penn State Water Quality Extension Web page (<http://wqext.psu.edu>). Has fact sheets and other publications related to

private water systems.

- The Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection Drought Information Center (<http://www.dep.state.pa.us/dep/subject/hotopics/drought/>). Offers drought statistics, regulations, news updates and water conservation ideas.

Hort Healing Seminar Focus

GETTYSBURG (Adams Co.) — Gardens offer therapeutic benefits for children and adults, experts say, especially those who are physically challenged, suffering from chronic diseases and mental or emotional illnesses.

Aside from being places to enjoy sunshine, fresh air and physical activity, gardens are places to escape stress, to meditate and to heal.

"How to Create Healing Environments through Horticulture" is the topic of an upcoming semi-

nar sponsored by Penn State Cooperative Extension from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. on April 4 at the Adams County Agricultural and Natural Resources Center in Gettysburg.

Mona Gold of Friends Hospital in Philadelphia will be the keynote speaker. The program cost is \$30, which covers breakfast, lunch and materials.

For registration forms and additional information, call extension agents Ginger Pryor at (717) 270-4391 or Annette McCoy at (717) 240-6500.

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