

Easter Eggs – Margučiai

Everything you wanted to know about decorating Easter eggs the Lithuanian way!

This year, due to the pandemic, you may have more time to spend at home decorating Easter eggs in the Lithuanian folk-art tradition. All it takes is patience and practice!

There are two ways Lithuanians decorate Easter eggs, both involving dye: the scratch method and the wax (batik or resist) method. The founder of the Lithuanian Folk Art Institute, Antanas Tamošaitis, compiled an entire book called Easter Eggs, published by the institute in 1982. It contains a vast variety of patterns to instruct and inspire everyone from amateur to artist.

EGG DYES

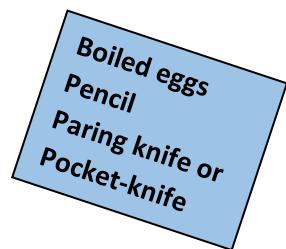
Most of us rely on the simple dyes sold in supermarkets before Easter each year, and these are certainly adequate. For deeper, more permanent colours, Ukrainian egg dyes are available in Ukrainian stores or online. (Ask about these dyes to make sure they are edible.)

The brighter or deeper the colour, the more attractive the patterns will be on the finished egg. There are many “folk” ways to dye eggs using natural materials, some of which are detailed below. Generally, to intensify the colour, the eggs must be immersed in dye for quite a long time. Vinegar is used as a fixative (mordant), and recipes in Lithuania call for 9%, whereas in North America vinegar seems to be sold at 5% acidity. Regular dyes can be doubled or mixed to obtain more intense or unusual colours.

Experts tell us to use smooth eggs, and for natural dyes, to be sure the eggs don’t touch each other or the sides of the pot they are immersed in. A dishtowel or paper towel can be placed in the bottom of the pot. Eggs should be carefully lifted out and patted dry, to avoid any unwanted marks and allowed to dry without rubbing.

SCRATCH METHOD

The scratch method is in some ways easier, because all you need is a **dyed egg** (the darker the better the designs will show) and a **pocket-knife or a paring knife**, or any utensil you may find handy to hold like a pencil. Scratch patterns are infinite in their variety and can be drawn on the egg beforehand, or created as you work. Here are some examples from Tamošaitis’ book. Sit back, relax, and don’t rush. This is a labour of love, so start thinking about it well before Easter!





Examples of scratch method eggs from [Easter Eggs](#) by Antanas Tamošaitis. Begin with simple lines, then branches, triangles and diamonds.

WAX METHOD

Boiled eggs
Beeswax (chopped or grated)
Heat source (eg, candle in a vented holder)
Jar lid or tea light base
Pencil (with eraser tip)
Flathead pin or small nail

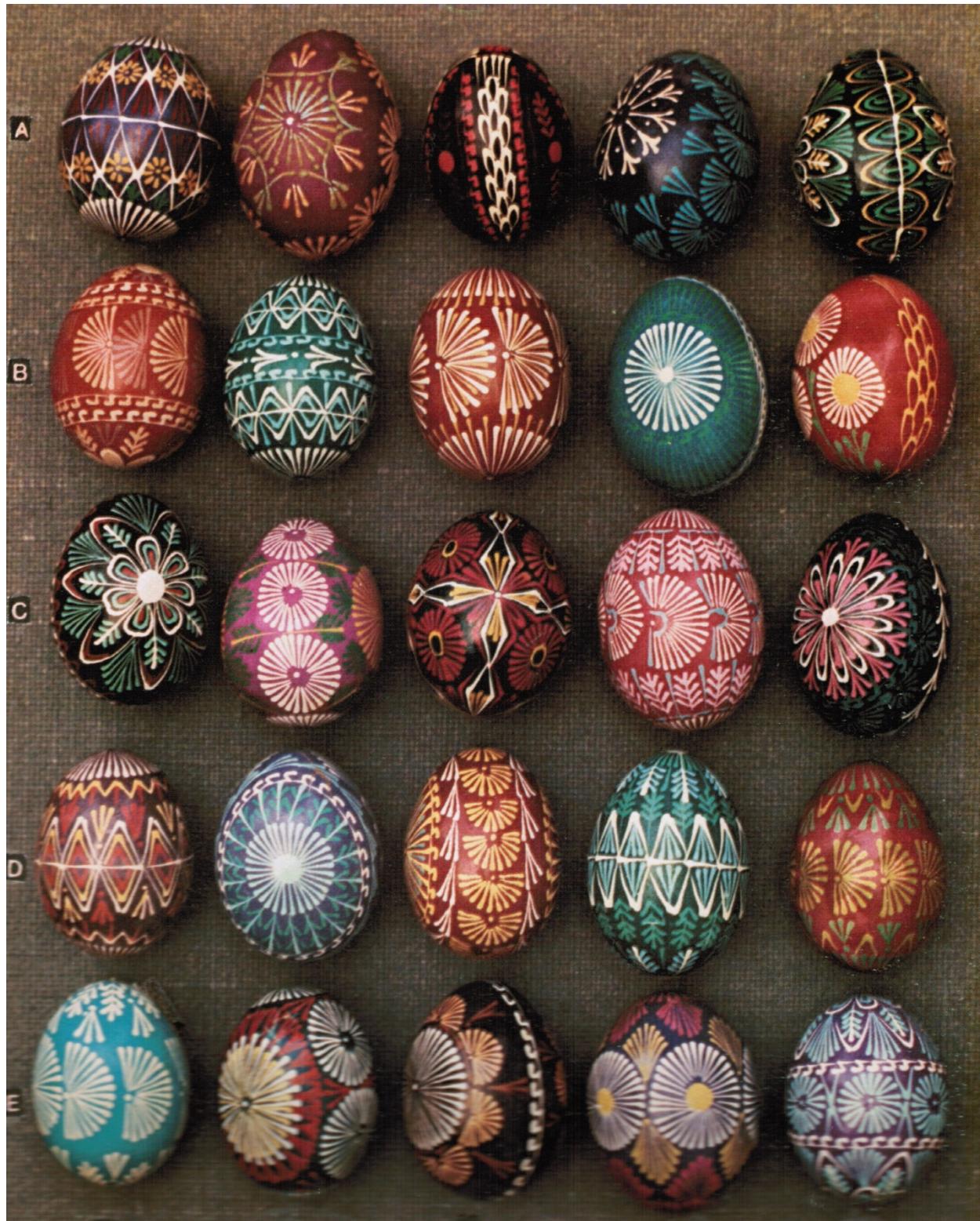
There are endless beautiful patterns to make using the wax method. It may require a bit more practice to perfect the strokes, which are a slender teardrop shape. The eggs should be boiled with a generous pinch of salt to avoid breakage. White eggs, though more fragile, serve as a better background for most patterns than brown eggs. Brown eggs generally have harder shells.

The resist method requires starting with an undyed or dyed egg, applying wax, then dyeing it again in another colour. The colour beneath the wax will show through once the wax is removed. Two or three layers of colour can be achieved this way before removing the wax. For additional colour, wax crayons may be added to the beeswax.

You will need some **beeswax**. Paraffin is not suitable, as it will not adhere properly to the egg. Candlewax (or tallow) can be used, but does not produce the best results. You will need a **container** such as a jar lid or tea light holder for the wax, set on a **source of heat** below it to keep the wax liquid. This can be some type of candle enclosed in a holder vented at the sides (such as a small cemetery candle or aromatherapy container). For a group, the wax can be divided among tinfoil tart pans, and warmed by setting in an electric frying pan. This can be more difficult with younger children, because participants' hands must be close to the hot wax container

The most widely used instrument for making the characteristic dots and strokes is a metal, flat-headed (sewing) **pin** with its point firmly inserted into the eraser end of a **pencil**. A tiny-headed nail may also be used. The pin head is then dipped in the wax, and holding the pencil pin side down, the wax is applied to a (room temperature or ideally still-warm) egg as a dot. To make the slender teardrop strokes, the pearl of wax applied is immediately dragged in a straight or curved line away from the dot in the direction required by the pattern.

Once the desired pattern is completed, allow the wax to dry completely for several hours or overnight. Remove the wax by scraping gently, using a thumbnail or warm dry dishcloth. Smoothing the wax over the egg to coat it will also shine the shell, enhancing the colours, and make it stronger.



DYES

There are many recipes to experiment with using natural dyes such as berries, vegetables, onion skins, teas and even spices, especially turmeric. Follow directions for best results...

For a **deep blue** colour, heat frozen blueberries or 200-250 grams of blueberry jam, in $\frac{1}{2}$ litre of water with 1 tablespoon of vinegar. Strain the mixture to prevent particles on the eggs. Immerse boiled eggs for $\frac{1}{2}$ hour for a pastel colour, or 4-5 hours for a deep, rich colour. Check periodically for intensity and remove eggs when they have reached the desired hue, allow to dry without patting or rubbing. Once dry, apply oil to make the eggs shine.

A rich **yellow** colour can be produced by boiling turmeric with $\frac{1}{2}$ litre of water. Strain to remove lumps, add vinegar and immerse boiled eggs in the liquid for 3 hours. To attain a **mossy green** colour put turmeric-dyed eggs into the purple cabbage dye for ten minutes.

Here is a chart for using various natural dyes. Brown eggs have harder shells, but most dyes may produce a muddy colour. All plant material amounts are approximate, and require boiling in $\frac{1}{2}$ litre (2 cups) of water, straining (unless a textured pattern is preferred) and adding 1 tablespoon of white vinegar.

For traditional onion-skin dyeing, have a pot filled $\frac{3}{4}$ full with loose onion skins (not tamped down). Nestle the eggs in the pot so they are covered with the skins, and no egg is showing. Cover with warm water and leave at room temperature overnight. In the morning, add vinegar, let the pot simmer for 10 minutes once the water comes to a boil. Allow the eggs to stand for $\frac{1}{2}$ hour. Remove from the pot while they are still warm.

Traditional patterning of the onion-dyed eggs is achieved by moistening the egg surface slightly with water or egg white and patting on leaves, petals or grass-blades, wrapping the egg in onion skins, and then tying the bundled egg into a cheesecloth or a tube cut from nylon hosiery to keep the leaves and skins from falling away during boiling.

Finally, a surprising dye effect can be achieved with wine. Apparently, it sparkles!

| Colour | Egg Colour | Plant Material | Dye Cooking Time | Dyeing Time |
|----------------|------------|---|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Sky blue | White | 200 g (7 oz) finely chopped purple cabbage | 15 min., until almost black | Check for desired intensity |
| Dark green | Brown | As above | As above | As above |
| Brown to black | Dark brown | As above | As above | As above |

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|--------------------|----------------|--|--|---|
| Blue | White | 100 g (3.5 oz) frozen wild blueberries or 200-300 g (8-10 oz) blueberry jam processed in a blender with water | 5 minutes | 1/2 hour for pastel blue, 4-5 hours for deeper colour |
| Darker purple-blue | Brown | As above | As above | As above |
| Red | Brown or white | 2 cups red onion skins | Immersed in onion skins overnight | Boil for 10 minutes, rest in pot for ½ hour |
| Orange | White | 2 cups yellow onion skins | Immersed in skins overnight | Boil for 10 minutes, rest in pot for ½ hour |
| Rust | Brown | 2 cups yellow onion skins | Immersed in skins overnight | Boil for 10 minutes, rest in pot for ½ hour |
| Reddish-pink | White only | 4 raw beets , 2 grated coarsely, 2 finely, for more even coverage of egg surface | Cover pre-boiled egg in grated beet and wrap firmly in plastic | Refrigerate overnight for best colour |
| Deeper pink | Brown | As above | As above | As above |
| Yellow | White only | 3 tablespoons turmeric | Boil turmeric for 10 min. | 3 hours |
| Lavender | White | 30 g hibiscus tea | Steep to desired colour | 3 hours |
| Purple | Brown | 30 g hibiscus tea | Steep to desired colour | 3 hours |
| Green | White only | Put turmeric-dyed eggs into red cabbage dye | Turmeric 10 min. Cabbage 15 min | 10 minutes (longer immersion will result in blue colour) |
| Purple-blue | White only | 1 bottle semi-sweet wine for 10 eggs in a shallow pan | Boil for 10 minutes | Allow to rest for 12 hours |