

Dying Easter Eggs In the Tradition of the Santa Clara Swiss Settlers

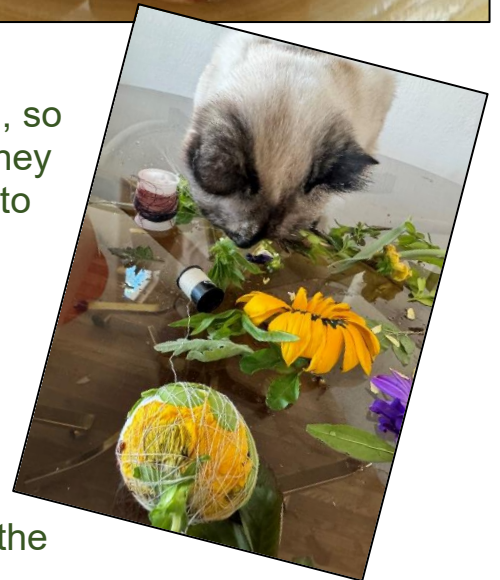
The Swiss settlers who came to Santa Clara brought with them a unique method of dying Easter eggs. This tradition is still followed by many of the descendants of these hardy people.

The raw eggs are wrapped in flowers, weeds, grasses, leaves or whatever foliage is available. The flowers and leaves, etc., are fastened to the egg using thread, wrapping it around the leaves and flowers with just the right amount of tension. If it's too loose, the leaves and flowers don't make much of a design, as too much dye gets inside the wrappings; if it's too tight, the design is also affected because the dye can't get into the wrapping.



There is typically a brisk competition among family members about whose eggs are the most beautiful, so each person selects a different color of thread so they can identify their eggs. Others might use a marker to put an initial or image on their eggs to make identification easy.

After the eggs are wrapped, they are put into a dye. Traditionally, brown skins from regular onions are boiled until they release color, then the eggs are immersed in this dye and cooked for 20-25 minutes. This dye produces a brownish color, and the leaves and flowers leave traces of their own color.



Alternatively, a locally found plant that locals call "red root" and is in the Madder plant family, is used for dying. This plant grows along ditch banks



and creeks. The roots from mature plants can be boiled to release their reddish-purple dye. As ditch banks have disappeared in our area, it's getting harder to find this plant for dying Easter eggs, but locals usually have favorite places that they're reluctant to share, or they even cultivate this weed in their own yards just for dying

eggs. This dye produces a reddish-purple color, and combined with certain flowers, like purple iris, produces beautiful designs.

This tradition is cherished by many who want to impress upon their families the heritage they have, and to remember the hardships and the sacrifices of their ancestors.





