



The Origins of Easter

Centuries before it was adopted as the most important of the Christian festivals, Easter had been a pagan fertility festival , celebrating the Spring Equinox (March 21st). It was called *Ostara*, but it is thought to have derived from *Eostre*, a Germanic goddess of spring. Her feast day was held on the full moon following the spring equinox, much like the Christian Easter Sunday always falls on the first Sunday after the full moon following the Spring Equinox. That is why Easter can fall on any date between 22nd March and 25th April, and is known as a “moveable feast”.

Apart from the name and the date, the other legacies from the pagan festival are the easter rabbit and easter eggs. As many pagan writers have observed, “All the fun things about Easter are pagan.”

The Easter bunny came from the fact that the pagan goddess Eostre had as her symbol the rabbit or hare. Exchanging eggs or decorating houses with painted eggs became closely associated with this festival across many cultures, following the tradition of pagan anglo-saxons who made offerings of painted eggs to the goddess Eostre , the egg symbolising re-birth at spring-time.

Different countries and cultures have adopted unique traditions;

- The Romanians hold an “egg-championship” in families or social groups. This entails knocking hard-boiled eggs together, the victor being the one whose egg survives intact. The loser has to eat all the broken eggs.
- In Sweden, houses are decorated with willow or birch twigs and children dress up as Easter witches, with painted faces

and carrying a broom, they knock on neighbours doors for a treat, a bit like Halloween. A similar tradition exists in Finland.

Our transition from real eggs to chocolate eggs happened in the Victorian period. The UK's first chocolate egg was produced in 1873 and the first filled egg in 1923. Nowadays, every year over 80 million boxed chocolate shell eggs are sold in the UK, not to mention Crème Eggs and Mini Eggs. The annual sales of Cadbury's Crème Eggs exceeds 200 million!

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