

Tell me Podcast Episode 2

Easter, chocolate eggs and rabbits



Hello everyone and welcome to our Tell me mini podcast. My name's Marc and I'm an information officer at the Alimentarium Food Museum in Vevey. If you've never heard of us before, the Alimentarium is the first museum in the world that looks at all aspects of human food. It's in Vevey, on Lake Geneva in the French-speaking part of Switzerland. We launched this series of podcasts in French a few months ago, to answer children's questions about food and nutrition. This episode is a translation of one of those episodes and we hope that our English-speaking visitors will also find it interesting and that it might even encourage you to send us your questions by e-mail or via social media. We've all got questions about food, no matter how old or young we are! So please write to us or, better still, send us an audio recording with your question. We'll give you all the contact details at the end of this episode. In the meantime, sit back and enjoy listening to us answer Ludivine, who is eleven years old and who wanted to know why we eat chocolate eggs and rabbits at Easter.

One possible answer can be found in the stories and folk tales that have been shared by the fireside and handed down from generation to generation. Especially one particular legend from Germany, which tells the story of a penniless woman who could not afford to give her children any sweet treats at Easter. So, since she had plenty of eggs, she hid some in the garden. When the children went out to look for the eggs, they also saw a rabbit in the garden, so they thought it maybe had laid the eggs!

OK, so you might say that explains the rabbit, but why chocolate rabbits? Well, as you can probably guess, this is also linked with Germany and the story of the rabbit I've just told you.

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In Europe, at the end of the 19th century, they finally got the recipe right to make solid chocolate to nibble on as we do today. They then had fun shaping it to look like various animals and objects, using specially made containers called moulds. These chocolate moulds were made in special factories and, at the beginning of the 20th century, most of these factories were set up in Germany. Factory workers used flat sheets of tinfoil; the same kind of metal used to make the tins we buy tomatoes in today. They then used giant hammers, called drop hammers, to turn the sheets of metal into various shapes. The designers who created the patterns for the moulds found inspiration in popular culture, such as fairy tales for example, and started drawing rabbits and eggs. So, these factories then made lots of tinfoil moulds of rabbits and supplied them to European and American chocolate makers. This might partly explain why the chocolate bunny has become so popular. But let's get back to why we eat eggs at Easter though. From a religious point of view, an egg is a strong symbol of life. For Christians, an egg represents the resurrection of Jesus Christ, which is celebrated at Easter. However, there is also another explanation, which is perhaps a bit more 'convenient'.

The time of year between Carnival and Easter is called Lent. In the Middle Ages, the Church forbade people to eat certain kinds of food during Lent, especially food that came from animals, which meant not eating meat, nor butter or...even eggs! This time of year was called the 'lean' period. Once Lent was over, people often had lots of eggs that needed to be eaten quickly so as not to waste them.

So, there you have it! Now you know the story of Easter eggs and bunnies! If, like Ludivine, you've got questions about food, please send them to us by emailing community@alimentarium.org or via social media. We'll be happy to answer them in our next episodes.

While waiting for that, there's much more to explore on www.alimentarium.org! There are hundreds of objects to discover in the Museum's collection, plus magazine articles, games and quizzes! You can also listen to other episodes of our Tell me podcast, as well as download the scripts and interactive illustrations.

Thanks for listening!
We hope you'll join us again soon!