

How to Build the Perfect Easter Eco-Basket

Easter treats from Jacques Torres, Bettys, Jelly Belly, Dufflet, Aphrodite and more

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Photo (bottom left) by John Muggenborg

WHY IT'S GOOD: Biting the head off a chocolate bunny and hunting through the grass—whether outdoors or in one's own basket—to uncover lovingly hidden gems are cherished rituals passed on from parent to sugar-crazed kid. And while sugar is one thing, additives are another. With these healthier candies, made with natural ingredients and without artificial flavors, colors and preservatives, you are at least not contributing to allergies and behavioral problems.

WHY IT'S GREEN: On top of being healthier for your kids, some candy companies go that extra mile of green goodness, ensuring their workers make a fair wage (Divine's mini-eggs); that some or all of their ingredients are organic, and thus grown without chemical pesticides or insecticides (Surf Sweets' jelly beans, EcoExpress' cookies, Aphrodite's chocolates, which are made in their very own kitchen), and that their candies are made vegan, or without any animal-product ingredients (EatPastry's truffle eggs, Sweet Earth's dark-chocolate bunnies). We also found you some eco-Easter basket materials: Go Natural Baby's fair trade baskets are hand-woven by Ghanaian artisans from elephant grass and dyed with plant extracts; Wiley Valentine's shredded paper discards are kept out of landfills; and India Tree's food-decorating dyes contain 100% natural, FDA- and EU-approved vegetable dyes. And why not throw in an organic cotton stuffed animal or two?

When you're young, Easter can hold the same kind of wonderment as Christmas and Halloween. My brothers and I were instructed to wait in the kitchen as my aunt hid small treasures in not-so-secret spots. The Fabergé-like, buttery picture eggs were my favorite, to be eaten last—regardless of how many fluorescent marshmallow chicks we'd downed already. The resultant sugar overload was right up there with Halloween, and I warily think now of all the artificial colors and flavorings ingested. Fortunately, today's Easters needn't be quite so toxic. Here, our picks for a naturally delicious Easter:

1. Start by lining a brightly colored, hand-woven fair-trade basket (bottom right) with vivid scraps of paper (misprints and discards) from letterpress printer Wiley Valentine (top right). Or, shred that gently used giftwrap and tissue you've been saving for a rainy day.
2. Next, add layers of filler like Divine's chocolate mini-eggs or Sweet Earth's eggs and bunnies, Pete's Gourmet handmade espresso, strawberry, lemon & vanilla marshmallows, Jelly Belly or Surf Sweets' jelly beans, and Dufflet's rich dusted chocolate morsels (bottom, center).
3. Nestle in a few mid-size pieces like these gorgeous truffle eggs from EatPastry or EcoExpress' buttery egg and chick cookies, Bettys adorably sweet chocolate lambs or chick and rabbit biscuits (second from top), and Kennedys mixed chocolate ducks (center).

4. Tuck in a soft stuffed bunny (PeaceToys), lamb (Kathe Kruse), duck (Our Green House), or chicken (Lana Organic) and a big chocolate bar from Bloomsberry (top left).

5. Now for the showstoppers: Bettys makes a 7-inch-tall, long-eared milk chocolate bunny, Chocolate Decadence's towering 12-inch, lanky cowboy bunny comes complete with chaps, and for a real shock—present the little ones with a nearly five-foot-tall, cheerful life-size bunny from Jacques Torres (small bunny, bottom left), who also handcrafts bunny families and picturesque bas-relief, bunny-patch-scene bars. The jackpot? Aphrodite makes hand-decorated, swirled art eggs like the Picasso, a 6-inch masterpiece—grab a hammer and crack this baby open, there are more sweet morsels inside. For home-grown sweets, dye eggs and cupcake frosting the natural way with vegetable pigments. For organic baking ingredients, click here. Last tip? Start with the ears! —Elizabeth McMullen