

Hard-Cooked Eggs



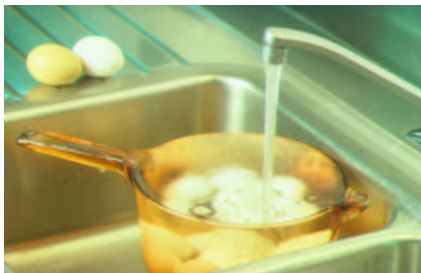
1. Place **eggs** in single layer in saucepan. Add enough tap **water** to come at least 1 inch above eggs.



2. Cover. Quickly bring just to boiling. Turn off heat.



3. If necessary, remove pan from burner to prevent further boiling. Let eggs stand, covered, in the hot water about 15 minutes for Large eggs (12 minutes for Medium, 18 for Extra Large).



4. Immediately run cold water over eggs or place them in ice water until completely cooled.



5. To remove shell, crackle it by tapping gently all over.



6. Roll egg between hands to loosen shell.

7. Peel, starting at large end. Hold egg under running cold water or dip in bowl of water to help ease off shell.



8. To segment eggs evenly, various styles of egg slicers and wedgers are available. For chopped



eggs, rotate a sliced egg 90° in the slicer and slice again. No slicer? A sharp pastry blender and a bowl work, too. When a wedger's wires are drawn down only partway, an egg can be opened to hold a stuffing or resemble a flower.

Hard-Cooked Egg Tips

Coddled eggs made by very briefly immersing an egg in the shell in boiling water are not sufficiently cooked to satisfy today's food safety concerns. Eggs cooked in coddlers (porcelain, heat-proof glass, pottery or ceramic cups with screw-on lids) submerged in simmering or boiling water should be cooked until the whites are completely set and the yolks have begun to thicken but are not hard.

Whether hard- or soft-cooked, this method is incorrectly called boiled eggs. Although the cooking water must come to a boil, more tender, less rubbery eggs without a green ring around the yolk are produced, and less breakage occurs, when the heat is turned off or the pan removed from the burner, allowing the eggs to cook gently in hot water. This method is also more energy efficient and is food safe.

Shell cracking is most likely when eggs are cooked for too long and/or at too high a temperature because steam builds up more rapidly than the eggs can "exhale" it. Too rapid cooking is why eggs cannot be cooked in the shell in the microwave – they'll very likely explode. Overcooking produces enough steam to rupture the shells; proper cooking alleviates the problem. Cracking is particularly likely to occur if more than one layer of eggs is cooked at a time in rapidly moving boiling water which causes the eggs to bump against one another.

Piercing, puncturing the large end of the eggshell with a sharp tool before cooking, may allow some air to escape to help avoid cracking and water to enter which may make peeling easier. But, piercing also creates hairline cracks in the shell through which bacteria can enter after cooking, making piercing a food safety concern. Unless sterilized, the piercer, thumbtack, pin or needle itself can introduce bacteria.

To avoid a harmless, but unsightly, greenish ring around hard-cooked yolks, avoid overcooking and cool the eggs quickly after cooking by running cold water over them or placing them in ice water (not standing water) until they've completely cooled. The ring is caused by sulfur and iron compounds naturally reacting at the surface of the yolk. It's usually brought on by overcooking or a high amount of iron in the cooking water. Once the eggs have cooled, refrigerate them in their shells until use.

Very fresh eggs may be difficult to peel. The fresher the eggs, the more the shell membranes cling tenaciously to the shells. Though many techniques to make peeling easier have been tried, the simplest method is to buy and refrigerate eggs a week to ten days in advance of hard cooking. This brief "breather" allows the eggs to take in air which helps separate the membranes from the shell. Before peeling, it's important to crackle the shells until they have a fine network of lines all over. Eggshells usually come off much more readily, without tearing the whites, when they're in small pieces rather than large chunks.

Hard-cooked eggs in the shell can be refrigerated up to one week. Hard-cooked eggs out of the shell should be used immediately.

Pickled eggs, steeped in an acidic marinade, once appeared in a large glass jar on the bar of many a neighborhood tavern. Now making a comeback, these savory bites are served as snacks, appetizers, salad garnishes and deviled eggs. Keep pickled eggs refrigerated – in several small containers, quart-sized or less, if they're to be consumed intermittently over a period of time. Use a clean implement to remove eggs from the solution to avoid introducing bacteria.

Try this fussless, fussless deviled egg method that's so simple beginning cooks can master it easily. To tote deviled eggs to a picnic or tailgate party, knead all the filling ingredients in a sealed food storage bag until smooth and well blended. Transport on ice or coolant in a cooler, along with the egg whites in a separate sealed container, and assemble on the spot. Simply snip off a corner of the bag and squeeze to refill the whites, just as if you were using a pastry bag.

Unfortunately for mountain-top residents, it's almost impossible to hard cook eggs at altitudes above 10,000 feet.

Beyond making egg salad, use chopped, sliced or wedged hard-cooked eggs to add protein and a happy glow to casseroles and tossed and composed salads. Slice hard-cooked eggs to layer in sandwiches. With chopped yolks and whites, make creamy Eggs Goldenrod or pretty Polonaise Sauce. For a hand-held snack, in addition to comforting deviled eggs or zingy pickled eggs, simply sprinkle whole eggs with an herb or dollop them with a flavored mayo. Take just a wee bit more time to coat whole eggs in sausage and bake or fry them for Scotch eggs.