

Quarantine Easter Egg Salad

Jennifer Eremeeva answers that eternal question: What am I going to do with all these hard-boiled eggs?

By [Jennifer Eremeeva](#)

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Don't taste like leftovers. **Jennifer Eremeeva / MT**

Easter looms as I write this, and I'm wondering if the Russian Orthodox Church is going to embrace technology and hold massive Zoom sessions for the traditional blessing ritual.

I will certainly miss the actual event, which draws photographers and foodies alike to it like moths to a searchlight. I love watching the faithful bring their Easter dishes to long tables set in the courtyard of churches, while priests move up and down with long brushes dipped in Holy Water to bless colored eggs, creamy Paskha, studded with dry fruits and nuts, and the fluffy mounts of iced kulich with "XB" piped in contrasting icing. My only worry is always that the hard-boiled eggs don't see the inside of the refrigerator ever after, as they take pride of place in a festive centerpiece.

Holidays are resilient things. During this unprecedented time of social distancing, social media has been flooded with heartwarming images of drive-by birthday parties for toddlers, virtual wedding vows, to say nothing of the multi-generational Seder dinners, with an ingenious "Elijah" appearing as one tile in what we've come to think of as "The Brady Bunch" mode of Zoom.

But whether you celebrate Catholic Easter or Orthodox or just commemorated the Angel of Death passing you by, chances are you have a few hard-boiled eggs lying around. And there is nothing better to do with them than to make a delectable, mouth-watering, classic egg salad.

I'm not sure why egg salad isn't more of a thing in Russia. Hard-boiled eggs are certainly the foot soldiers in the mayonnaise-based salads that dominate New Year's Eve, but except for deviled eggs, egg salad on its own — without beets, herring, carrots, or potatoes— is nowhere to be found in the Russian culinary canon. Perhaps it is because there isn't really a sandwich culture in Russia. Open-faced sandwiches abound, consisting of little more than a piece of bread with smoked fish or cured meat on it. Butter if you're lucky. But there isn't a "gimme an egg salad on toasted pumpernickel, hold the onions, extra lettuce" kind of sandwich culture.

So, this Easter, let's introduce both sandwich culture and egg salad!

Egg salad is one of those dishes that is delectable when done correctly and truly awful when it isn't. For me, it falls into an ever-broadening category of food I will only consume at home for fear it will be prepared incorrectly. Martinis fall into this category, as does roast chicken, lemonade, and risotto.

Texture is vital with egg salad: it cannot be too watery, or there is just no point, but nor should it be dry from overcooked yolks. It should be creamy but have little moments of crunch that surprise and delight. Briny notes are critical, and egg salad should have enough heat and spice to elevate the blandness of the eggs, and a lot of fresh greens to give it contrast and zing. Happily, Russian pantries are heaving with all the ingredients needed to make the perfect egg salad, from the ubiquitous mayonnaise to the essential pickled cucumbers and prepared horseradish.

There are plenty of ways to enjoy egg salad, but I can't think of a nicer one between two slices of Borodinsky or rye bread, with a very light layer of mayonnaise to avoid the salad seeping into the bread. But there are other ways, and I expand on them in the recipe below. You will note that egg salad is wonderfully adaptable, particularly with the wide range of Russian smoked and cured fishes as well as salty meats.

So, make yourself a big batch of egg salad, keep it in the fridge, and enjoy lots of different ways. And celebrate the arrival of spring!

If you haven't boiled and colored your eggs yet, the egg salad will taste much better if you keep the yolks on the "jammy side." Here's how:

- Place your eggs in a large pot of cold, salted water, and onion skins if coloring your eggs.
- Bring them gently to a boil (when the bubbles in the water begin to break on the surface.)
- Reduce heat and simmer for one (1) minute.

- Remove from the heat, cover and let sit for the following amount of time based on size:
 - *Large eggs: 15 minutes*
 - *Medium eggs: 12 minutes*
 - *Small eggs: 10 minutes*
- Remove eggs to a bowl of ice water to stop the cooking process.
- Refrigerate until use (I beg you!).

Ingredients

- 8 hard-boiled eggs
- 1/3 cup (80 ml) best-quality mayonnaise
- 1/4 cup (60 ml) sour cream
- 2 Tbsp "Rasol" (the juice from the capers and/or pickle jar)
- 1/4 cup (60 ml) capers (chopped if they are large)
- 1 medium-sized shallot, finely minced (or a bunch of scallions)
- 4 celery ribs with leaves, finely diced
- 1/2 cup (120 ml) cornichons or pickled cucumbers, chopped
- 1/2 tsp cayenne pepper
- 1 tsp celery salt
- 1 tsp dried mustard
- 2 Tbsp prepared horseradish
- 3 Tbsp fresh dill, chopped
- Salt and pepper to taste

Instructions

- Peel the eggs and separate the whites from the yolks. Dice the yolks into small cubes.
- Mash the yolks together with the rasol, mayonnaise, and sour cream, using the back of a fork.
- Toss egg whites in the egg yolk, rasol, mayonnaise, and sour cream mixture, then fold in the remaining ingredients.
- Adjust seasoning with salt and pepper

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