



Писанки

P Y S A N K Y

what do the
Colors
& Symbols
really mean?

by

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The colors themselves bestow wishes. Color combinations hold more power than solid colored eggs. For example, a woman must create a four-colored egg to neutralize a bad family separation. Following are the meanings of the colors with a note of the plants used before aniline dyes were available:



White, of course, means purity in addition to innocence and birth. The egg's natural shell's surface is waxed where white is to remain as there is no white dye. The albumen or white of the egg stands for water, and the shell itself means air. The candle used to melt the wax is of course, fire, and the dyes stand for earth. The art of pysanky incorporates the four main ancient alchemical symbols for life: Earth, Air, Fire, Water.



Yellow is the symbol of light, purity and the stars. It also means youth, happiness, success and wisdom. In the Christian sense yellow symbolizes recognition and reward. The vegetable dye was obtained from birch leaves, onion skins, wild apple bark or buckwheat husks.



Green stands for rebirth and renewal, fertility, health and hopefulness. In the Christian context it means bountifulness, hope and the victory of life over death. The dyes were made from grasses, myrtle leaves, sunflower seeds, birch leaves or the berries of wild elder. Some mosses and lichens give pleasant greens.



Blue means sky and air, magic and good health. The dye was prepared from marrow or logwood.




Orange represents strength, endurance and the pursuit of worthy ambition. Since it is a mixture of yellow and red, it also stands for the red of passion tempered by wisdom. It is the color of fire, so also symbolizes the sun. A wash of brown onionskin dye or one of Brazil wood was used in the old days.




Red is a favorite color of Ukrainian artists. It means happiness in life, hope, love and passion. It is the color of blood, which can also mean bravery, nobility and enthusiasm. It is the color of fire in magical folklore, which stood for charity and spiritual awakening. Red dye was first obtained from beet root, red onion skin, raspberries, rose hips and plums. At the turn of the 19th century it was gotten from imported Brazil wood (genus *Caesalpinia*) a tropical tree of the legume family.



Brown symbolizes the earth in which the harvest is grown - a very potent color for the ancient farmer. A coppery, or terra cotta brown was gotten by leaving the egg in a dye of brown onionskins for a longer period. Oak bark, tea, coffee or walnuts were also used.

 **Black** is the darkest time before the dawn, believed by ancient Ukrainians to be the time when the dead souls traveled. Therefore, it became known, in Christian times, to symbolize life after death. It can also mean ignorance or fear. Black in opposition to red means ignorance arising from passions. When opposing white, it can mean ignorance of the mind. Black also represents our continual search for knowledge - about ourselves and the universe around us - a reminder that we don't know everything, but can learn. Originally, Ukrainian women used the soot from their fireplace to get black. Black dye was also gotten from black walnut shells and oak bark.

 **Purple** is the highest vibration of the color spectrum. In Europe it stood for royalty, but to Ukrainians it means patience, faith and trust. This is a fairly new color used on pysanky.

The plants, seeds, barks, etc. used to make the dyes were boiled in water until the desired color was reached, and then vinegar or sauerkraut juice was added as a mordant to fix the dyes. Procedures and recipes to make the various dyes were kept as family secrets, passed from mother to daughter throughout the generations.