

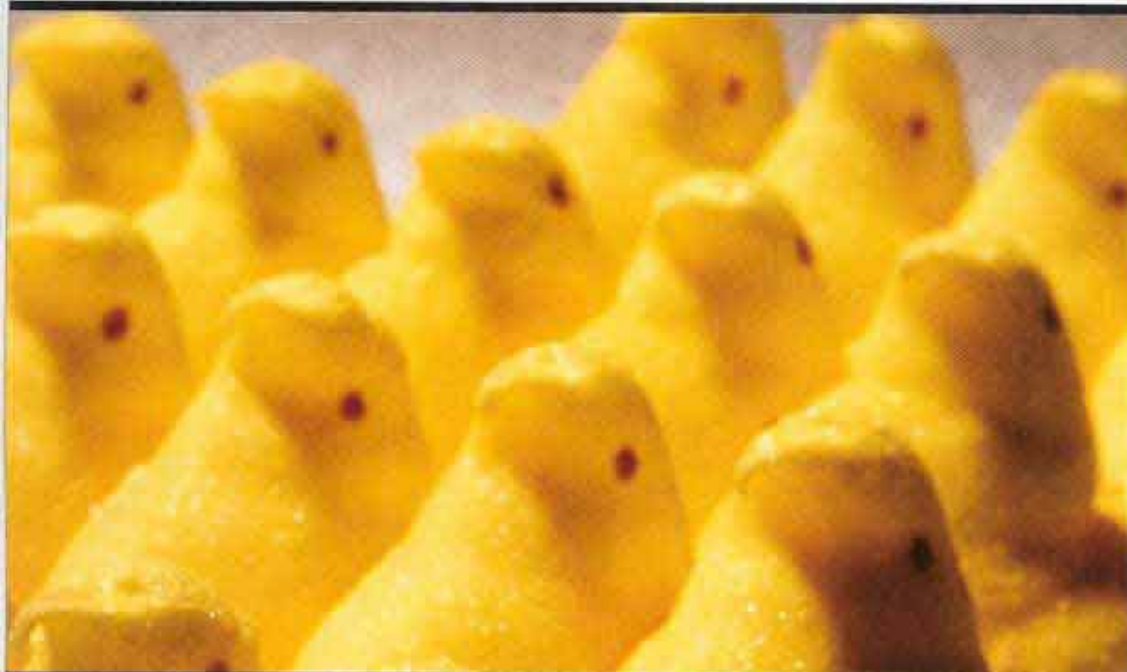
entrée

EAT, DRINK AND BE MERRY

planning a food event?

Let us know about it! E-mail associate editor Jennifer Rignani at jrignani@wqed.org.

photo by Richard Kelly



Pennsylvania cranks out 1.2 billion marshmallow Peeps a year. Look how orderly they are!

HOMEGROWN

Peeps That Won't Dye

Ask Pittsburghers who came of age in the 1950s about their memories of "peeps," and they'll ask you which kind. The live ones they used to buy at the five-and-ten that were dyed various colors, or the little candies? Each year, during the month of April, kids would go to G.C. Murphy's or sometimes the local hardware store to choose their annual peep pet. The downy chicks were dyed bright hues of purple, pink, green and other electrifying shades. Hundreds of tiny birds were kept in corrals under warm lights and then carried home by happy kids in Chinese-food take-out cartons. It was not unusual for

social calls to be interrupted by neon birds skittering across the coffee table. Inevitably, the novelty of the pets wore off along with the dye, and the peeps often passed away shortly after the holiday. And as many fads fade into the fabric of our pop culture history, so too did the peeps, as the avian torch was passed to their equally unnatural siblings, the marshmallow Peep.

We've all had them nesting in our Easter baskets. Lined in a row, attached by their mushy hips, marshmallow Peeps have been a staple of holiday candy forever. The Bethlehem, Pa., candy company Just Born makes 1.2 billion Peeps a year.

That's a lot of gooey birds. Fan clubs and confectionery aficionados from all over the world have detailed Internet chats about the things. And now, you can produce them at home.

Just Born has partnered with a California toy company to produce the Marshmallow Peeps Marshmallow Maker. It comes with a "marshmallow extruder," three molds, a stirring stick, a measuring cup and two packets of sanding sugar. The maker is available through the company's Web site, www.marshmallow-peeps.com, which also offers Peep recipes, opportunities to tour the factory and information on how to sign up for regular Peep newsletters. Now Peep fans can chew on the chickens all year long. —Jennifer Rignani

LEARN

That's Amore

Love Italian-style often comes in the form of cooking. Retiring after more than 37 years in a career as a food-service marketer for Heinz, Rita Venturino decided to share her passion with others and teach Italian culinary skills. "I was brought up in an Italian household in Braddock where cooking was the thing," says Venturino. When she retired, she did just that. Though she had offers to teach cooking classes around the region, she turned them all down. She figured that home is where you most enjoy cooking and eating, so in the home was where she should teach. Her husband, Mel Liebowitz, played a key role in launching the business: He's an independent broker of gourmet foods and kitchen culinary wares, making their kitchen an enviable smorgasbord of supplies.

Venturino's twice-a-month classes are filled with eager would-be Italian cooks and experienced cooks alike. Learning how to make homemade manicotti, braciola, focaccia, gnocchi and biscotti and then eating it all in the same night make the classes more event than school. The atmosphere is comfortable and joyful; often bands of friends will sign up together. Classes, held in her Richland Township home, range from \$35 to \$50. Call 724/443-4425 or visit www.ritaventurino.com —J.R.