

# Cascarones— A Smash for Easter



**H**AVE YOU EVER heard of exploding Easter eggs? As a south-of-the-border tradition, cascarones are eggshells filled with confetti and topped with tissue paper. They're colorful, sugar-free additions to Easter baskets—but watch out! A friend might sneak up and smash a cascarón over your head, showering you with rainbow-colored confetti!

Cascarones may have come from China, where the eggshells were filled with talcum powder and given as gifts. The explorer Marco Polo brought them to Italy in the late thirteenth century. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, these eggs were used in playful courtship rituals at European weddings and dances. Ladies surprised gentlemen by breaking the fragrance-filled eggshells over their heads when their backs were turned.

by Lynn Brooks

Art by Cassandre Maxwell

art © 2012 by Cassandre Maxwell



Hi, Mr. and Mrs.  
Shellton.  
Uh, did you enjoy  
your—GAG—  
afternoon?



Indeed! What a lovely  
day of sightseeing!





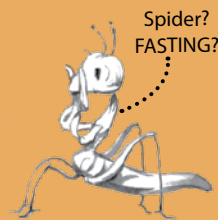
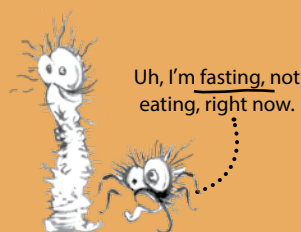
Empress Carlota, wife of Emperor Maximilian, introduced the eggs to Mexico during her husband's rule from 1864 to 1867. The talcum powder became ashes, cologne, or confetti, and the eggs were called cascarones, from the Spanish words for "shell," cáscara, and "to crack or burst," cascar.

Cascarones were first used in Mexico and Latin America to celebrate Carnival, the period of feasting and merrymaking before the religious season of Lent, a time of fasting and prayer. In Ecuador, Peru, and Colombia, children filled empty eggshells with colored water and sealed them with a flour paste, then threw them at each other in the streets. In el baile de los cascarones, the dance of the cascarones, ladies broke eggshells over the gentlemen's heads as a not-so-subtle invitation to dance.

For many families in Mexico, preparations for Easter begin in December with the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe, a celebration honoring the patron saint of Mexico. Newspapers are cut into confetti, and scraps of colored tissue paper and empty eggshells are saved for making cascarones in the spring.

A natural addition to Easter festivities, cascarones symbolize new life and a new season. The egg represents creation, and the tissue-paper closures, cut in many spring colors, resemble

Spider's corner has all the excitement of Latin America, countries south of the U.S. where Spanish and Portuguese are spoken. Such delicious food! Speaking of food, who's hungry?



multicolored flowers in green grass. When a cascarón is broken, the “gates of heaven” are opened, showering people with a rainbow of graces and good fortune.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, cascarones appeared in the southwestern United States and California with the growing Mexican-American population. Children’s author and artist Carmen Lomas Garza recalls her childhood experiences with cascarones in her book *In My Family/En Mi Familia*. “On Easter Sunday, after church we would go swimming. After swimming, we’d eat, and after eating, we’d bring out the cascarones. We would sneak up on our brothers or sisters or friends, break the cascarones on their heads, and rub the confetti into their hair. Sometimes my brothers would put flour in the eggshells, so that when they broke them on your wet head, the flour would turn to paste. That’s how sneaky my brothers were sometimes.”

Today you can find cascarones at most fiestas—religious holidays, birthday or wedding celebrations, or tributes to important historical heroes or events. They are also popular fundraisers at school fairs, art shows, and other festive gatherings in the southwestern United States. Cascarones may have changed form and function as they traveled the world, but they’re always a smashing good time!

