

GRÜNDONNERSTAG / GREEN THURSDAY

Tag # 2: (1) names—Green Thursday, Holy Thursday, Maundy Thursday, Gründonnerstag
(2) customs and traditions:

- Custom is to eat vegetables in large quantities before the fast on Good Friday, or else you will be changed into a donkey.
- Why the color green? Green symbolize the return of spring, sunlight over darkness, good over evil, etc.
- Eggs laid on this day are regarded as bringing good luck.
- Germans color their eggs green on this day and carry these eggs all day long for good luck.
- Eggs are made of chocolate, Marzipan, and nougat.
- Although it is not a church holiday, Green Thursday, four days before Easter, also played a role in rural customs of earlier times.

Green Thursday (*Gründonnerstag*), known to many in America as Maundy Thursday, was the day on which penitent sinners were accepted back into the church for Communion. It used to be traditional to clean the house thoroughly on this day, a custom which is possibly linked to the preparation for the Passover Feast. Another custom attached to Green Thursday was that of taking a bath, either simply out of a desire to be clean at Easter or possibly as a vague reminder of Jesus Christ's washing the disciples' feet at the Last Supper, which is thought to have taken place on the Thursday before the crucifixion.

Green food, such as spinach, kale, cress, leek, chives and other herbs are traditionally eaten on Green Thursday, because of the superstitious belief that greens eaten on this day would keep one safe during the year.

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Gründonnerstag (Maundy Thursday) commemorates the Last Supper, the meal Jesus shared with his disciples the day before he died. Gründonnerstag literally means "green Thursday." Although the name probably comes from an ancient word, *grein*, which means "cry" or "weep," the color green is used on that day as a symbol of renewal. Gründonnerstag meals traditionally include green foods, like spinach, leeks and chives.

But why is it a bunny that brings the eggs at this Christian festival?

"This is a tradition that has evolved gradually from the Middle Ages," says Beate Witzel, a biologist working in the natural history collection in Berlin's City Museum. At that time Green Thursday (Maundy Thursday) marked the end of the business year, and on that day the farmers had to pay their dues on the land to the owners—usually in kind.

As a result of the Lent fast preceding Easter they tended to have a lot of eggs. They cooked these and paid their dues with them. And at the same time they presented to their lords the hares—often in considerable numbers—that they had killed in their fields.

In Weimar a local custom recalls the author Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, who lived in the area for decades. Once a year on Green Thursday he would invite children into his garden where he had hidden eggs for them to find. Weimar maintains the tradition to this day and invites youngsters to search for Easter eggs in the Park on the river Ilm where Goethe's residence stands.