The Basic Steps

What is needed:

(1) Clean, raw eggs at room temperature. The eggs should be carefully checked for cracks; this can be done by "candling" them (examining them in front of a light or candle). The eggs should be cleaned, using vinegar in water; do not use soaps—this will damage the shell, and the dyes will not take properly. The eggs should be at room temperature; if they are cold, the wax will not stick properly, and the eggs will "sweat" (water will condense upon them), ruining the look of the dye. The eggs must be raw—cooking them damages the shell, and the dyes will not take properly.

(2) Prepared dyes, also at room temperature. Dyes should be prepared following the directions on the packet. Most call for vinegar to be added; the vinegar is a mordant, it allow the dye to bind with the surface of the egg. A few of the dyes do not need vinegar; in fact, adding it will ruin the dye. (The need for vinegar is noted prominently on the packet.) Allow the dyes to cool completely before using them; hot dyes may melt the wax, ruining the pysanka.

(3) Vinegar. This is needed as a mordant for the dyes; older dyes (those saved from previous years) can be revitalized by adding a tablespoon of vinegar. A vinegar solution is used to clean the eggs before dying them; this is prepared by adding a tablespoon of vinegar to a pint of water.

(4) Beeswax. This can be bought in small cakes. Other waxes may not be substituted; paraffin and other waxes have lower melting points, and will smear or not stick to the egg properly. In addition, heating beeswax turns it black, making it easy to see once applied.

(5) Stylus. This is also known as a kistka or pysal'tse. It is the instrument used for writing with the wax on the egg. Traditional styluses are made from a small cone of metal mounted on a short willow stick. More modern styluses are made with cast brass cones and non-flammable plastic sticks. There are also electric styluses available; they provide a constant source of heat, and make more consistent lines.

(6) Candle. Used for heating the beeswax, and for melting it off once done.

(7) Pencil. This is used for drawing guide lines onto the egg. A hard pencil—2.5 or 3—is best. The pencil lines will come off when the wax is removed.

(8) Paper products. This includes newspapers to cover the work area, paper napkins for drying the eggs after dying, paper towels for removing the wax (with candle), and paper tissues for finishing the wax removal with a cleaning solution.

(9) Q-tips. These are useful for applying dye to small areas of the egg. A small brush may also be used.

(10) Cleaning solution. There is a cleaning solution called Carbo-Sol, which is made from trichloro-ethylene, and is very good at removing wax primarily. Alternatively, other cleaning solutions may be used, but many are benzene derivatives and are toxic as well as flammable. I avoid them. Make sure any solution you use is not water-based.

There is also an organic solvent which I use to remove the last of the wax from the egg after using a cnandle to remove the wax (traditional method). Goo Gone is non-toxic and non-flammable, and made from citrus oil. I place a small amount in the palm of my had, roll the egg around in it, and then use a Kleenex to remove the last little bits of wax, penciland carbon (from the candle flame).

(11) Urethane varnish. If you decide to give the eggs a gloss finish, this is the varnish you will wish to use. A small can will last for years and years.

(12) Drying rack. This can be purchased or made. It is necessary only if you wish to varnish the eggs.

Preparations:

(1) Cover your work area with old newspapers. Have your cooled dyes in jars on the work area. Put several sheets of paper towel over your work space. Keep your room temperature eggs in a paper egg carton or resting on paper tissues.

(2) Clean your egg with a mixture of diluted vinegar—dip the egg in a shallow bowl half-filled with the vinegar solution. Dab the egg dry— never rub.

Applying the design:

(1) Proceed to draw the basic design on a clean, dry egg at room temperature. Draw on the egg lightly with the pencil. Use a hard pencil—number 2.5 or greater. If you make a mistake with the pencil, do NOT use the eraser on it. Remember, the pencil lines (if drawn on lightly) will not show up in the final design (they will be removed with the wax), so mistakes are OK. Use the pencil to draw basic divisions and lines; do not draw on every single little detail.

(2) Heat the head of the stylus in the flame of the candle for 10 seconds. Then scoop a little beeswax into the funnel of the kistka, or dip the tip into the wax. Reheat the kistka in the flame until the wax is melted. If you leave the kistka in the flame too long, it might catch on fire, or the wax will get too warm and "blob" when you try to write. Counting to three will usually give you enough reheating time.

(3) Test the wax flow from the kistka on the newspaper before writing any wax lines on the egg. Occasionally, from over-filling, the kistka will let out a large blob of wax. If this should happen on the egg, there is nothing you can do. The wax bonds instantly to the eggshell; even if you try to scrape the wax off, the blob will still appear in your final design. Don't feel badly if this happens— even the most experienced egg artist has the occasional blob in their designs. If at all possible, try to incorporate it into the design. If you can't, remember: any art made by humans is going to have mistakes in it—that's what makes each egg truly unique.

(4) Apply wax to the egg. Everywhere there are lines in the design, apply wax. Remember that the pencil lines are just guides, and you won't be covering all of them with wax. Do the design on both sides of the egg. Use a fine kistka for fine lines, and a heavy kistka for filling in large sections. The dye will not go anywhere you apply wax. You don't need to re-apply wax every time you dip it in a dye; just apply the new lines for the color.

(5) Dye the egg. After applying the wax for a color, double check your egg to make sure you didn't miss any lines. Once you have checked, dip it in the next dye stated. Leave the egg in about 1 to 5 minutes, or until it is the desired brightness. Remove the egg with the spoon, and dab dry with tissues. Remember, the dye sequence is from light to dark. Do not leave the egg in too long, or it will begin to seep under the previously applied wax and ruin the egg. If the color hasn't taken in five minutes, the shell is bad, an dit won't.

Make sure to put the egg in some vinegar rinse (about one tablespoon vingar to one cup of water) before dyeing the egg in he first color. This will remove skin oils and other debris from th esurface of the egg and prepare it for dyeing. You do not need to repeat this before applying other colors.

Dyes and color sequences:

(1) White is the first color in most eggs. If brown eggs are used, this will be the first color, and it will affect all of the following colors. Brown eggs can give interesting effect, but white eggs should be used when first learning the craft.

(2) Light Blue, if needed in small amounts, is added next. It is dabbed on with a Q-tip of small brush. The yellow will remove the light blue.

(3) Yellow is used in almost all eggs. It is the base color; if the yellow does not take well, none of the other dyes will, either. Leave it on a bit longer than the other colors--three minues at least.

(5) Light green, if needed, is applied next, either with a Q-tip or, if larger amounts are called for, by immersion.

(4) Light blue, if needed in larger quantities (more than a few dots) is applied now. Light blue will cover the light green completely.

(6) Orange follows; it is a "rinse" color, meaning it will remove darker colors and thus can be used as a rinse. I keep two jars of orange around; the first to rinse the eggs (it will get dirty and muddy), and the second to apply the orange color.

(7) Scarlet (a bright red) is usually next.

(8) The color order is usually **White** --> **Yellow** --> **Gold** --> **Light Green** --> **Light Blue** --> **Turquoise** --> **Orange** --> **Brown** (if you want it lighter) --> **Brick** (if you want it lighter) --> **Pink** --> **Scarlet (Bright Red**) --> **Red** --> **Brown** (if you want it darker) --> **Brick** (if you want it darker) --> **Dark Red**.

(9) Black, brown, dark red, violet, dark/royal blue, dark green, or brick can be used as final colors.

(10) Remember, color sequence is usually from light to dark (orange being the exception). Buy a pattern book or two, and get an idea of color combinations that work, and how to sequence the colors. Experiment; you may have a few disasters, but you will also end up with some beautiful and original eggs!

Removing the wax:

(1) When you have finished applying wax to the design, dip the egg in the final color. Wait 5-15 minutes, then remove the egg from the dye, dab it dry, and let it sit a few minutes.

2) Take the egg, and hold it near the side of the flame. DO NOT hold the egg over the flame, because carbon will collect on the shell, and darken the design. Wait until the wax looks wet (only a few seconds, usually) and wipe the wax off with a clean piece of paper towel. Try to always use a fresh side of the towel (or a new towel) for each wipe, or else you'll just be rubbing wax all over the egg, and it will take a lot longer to finish your egg.

(3) Once most of the heavy wax has been removed, the remaining bits can be removed with Goo Gone. Hold the egg in the palm of your hand, put a few drops of Goo Gone on it, and coat it evenly. Wait a few minutes to let it work, and then gently dry it with a tissue.

(4) Alternatively, there is a much more modern and less labor-intensive way of removing wax. Carbo-Sol is a cleaning solution made from trichloro-ethylene, and is very good at removing wax primarily. It is heavier than water, so eggs tend to float on top of it, instead of sinking. I pour the solvent into a jar, place the egss in it, and then weigh them down with a tablespoon. In ten to fifteen minutes (depending on how thickly the wax is applied) he wax will dissolve and loosen. It can then be wipen off with a paper towel

Alternatively, other cleaning solutions may be used, but many are benzene derivatives and are toxic as well as flammable. I avoid them. Make sure any solution you use is not water-based.

Finishing up:

(1) You may wish to apply a glossy finish to the egg once completed. I use clear gloss urethane, a

synthetic varnish. Apply a very thin layer of varnish with your fingers (I wear disposable gloves, as it is very difficult to wash off) and set on the drying rack to dry. It usually takes about 24 hours for the varnish to dry completely.

(2) At this point, you may decide whether to leave the egg intact, or drain the insides. Eggs which have not been emptied may leak or explode. This is not pleasant. If you don't wish to empty the eggs, you probably should not varnish them, to decrease the probability of explosion. The inside will dry up over time. Never pick up pysanky and shake them!!!!!

(3) If you wish to empty the pysanka, you can buy an buy an egg-blowing device (it's fairly cheap) or a syringe to drain the egg. I use a Dremel tool to drill a fine hole at each end of the egg, and then blow out the contents. I rinse by injecting water into the emptied shell with a syringe.

(4) Once you've emptied the egg, let it set on a drying rack or in an egg carton overnight, to allow the last of the water or egg contents to drain out. After, you can clean the egg with water.

Storing the eggs:

(1) Keep the eggs out of direct light and heat. The light can fade the colors, and both light and heat can cause unemptied eggs to leak and explode.

(2) Do not shake or agitate unemptied eggs; this can cause them to explode.

(3) Do not store the eggs in air tight containers; it is best if air can circulate around the eggs. Paper egg cartons are best for this.

(4) Enjoy the eggs—display them and show them off, and give them as gifts. The eggs stand up to time quite well; I still have eggs that I made almost thirty years ago!