

How To Throw A May Basket Northwest Ohio Style

By Leland L. Hite



If your goal was to meet that special girl or guy, you would throw a May Basket on the apple of your eye. When you wanted to gather a group of friends for a party, you might throw a May Basket. Often, you wanted to recognize that special person for doing well, and throwing a May Basket was an appropriate recognition.

Not limited to the rural community but more frequent among those living in the country, our May Basket in Northwest Ohio was an organized social mixer and a method to accomplish any number of goals in the rural community. Any age group might throw a May Basket, but it was most favored by the young, say under 20. Despite the name of the month, May Baskets proliferated in the autumn.

As you might imagine, living on a farm or in a rural setting usually meant that your closest neighbors might be a mile or two away. To have a conversation or to catch up on the local gossip would require a trip down the road to see your neighbors. You could chat with them at church or at a school PTA meeting or while visiting the country store, but not all the needs of the community were met by these methods. The May Basket fulfilled the desire for social mixing in rural communities.

Details, details, details. There was a protocol for accomplishing a successful May Basket, and it went something like this. Anyone at any age could organize the event. An adult might take the lead for a group of children under the age of 10. Teenagers generally organized their own May Basket. The group ranged in size from about 8 to 20.

Did I mention keeping it secret? An important element for success was to keep the event secret from the person receiving the basket. Surprise was part of the event. If the secret was accidentally revealed, the event was not typically canceled but postponed to regain the element of surprise.

The basket could be any basket, but the most popular basket was a new bushel basket generally acquired from the local apple orchard business or vegetable farmer.

Filled to the top, the basket would contain mostly homemade goodies, such as fudge, popcorn balls, and candy apples, and, often, fresh fruit, such as plums, pears, and apples. In the bottom of the basket there might be several ears of homegrown popcorn, a crop coveted by the parents.

Prior to the delivery of the basket, the participants hid in the most unusual locations, such as the haymow, the corncrib, the property owner's car, or the



cornfield. Almost anywhere was acceptable as long as the crowd remained nearby. The event most often took place prior to dusk.

Basket delivery: This is when the fun began. The objective was for the recipient to answer the doorbell and see the basket of goodies but not the delivery person. When you were chosen to deliver the basket to the front door, you rang the doorbell and ran like heck to avoid getting caught. You were always in a hurry, and it might appear that you threw the basket, of course without spilling the contents: thus the phrase *throwing a May Basket*.

It was game on, as the *seek* part of the hide & seek began, sometimes easy, sometimes not, but always a lot of fun.

After the last person had been located, the group gathered around, socialized, and ate the goodies. Depending on the size of the crowd, the gathering might remain in the front yard or, more often, be invited indoors.

While I have no specific details to offer other than participating in many May Baskets myself, I suspect there could have been a marriage or two resulting from people meeting at such events.

Certainly a great tradition and a terrific way to meet people and grow up in the 1950s and 60s in Winameg, Ohio!

Version by Janet Crew-Isaksen, Wauseon, Ohio, July 2013

We made May Baskets filled with flowers and hung them on a friend's or neighbor's doorknob, rang the doorbell, and ran like heck so they would not see us. We would hide and watch how they reacted. I did this with my kids when they were little, and my grandkids have done it to me a few times. Of course, Grandma, being swift (teehee), always catches them! For me, the May Basket was always an act of kindness. It just made us feel good!

Version by Gloria Thompson, now Gloria Forrest, Delta, Ohio, July 2013

It was May 1953 when the May Basket showed up on our front porch. The three Thompson kids ran thru the cemetery and fields barefooted to catch all the kids who brought the basket. When all the kids were corralled, my dad, Ed Thompson, put all the kids in the farm truck and took us down to the Trading Post at Manns' Corner for ice cream. That was fun.

Version by Helen Rowland Peebles, September 2013

These were fun times growing up around Winameg. I couldn't wait for May to get here. I remember my mom, Dortha Rowland, made sure we had something to put in the basket. Quite often, it was a shoebox decorated with crepe paper. Great memories.



I thank Dr. Robert T. Rhode for his important assistance with editing. Check his site, www.roberttrhode.org, where you find fascinating "Books and eBooks from the HeartLand" and several free documents to enjoy, including original portraits of famous authors painted in the sumi-e tradition, greeting cards, and suggestions for writers.

Footnote: Northwest Ohio, including Wauseon, Winameg, and Delta, seemed to be the only area in the world where this version of the May Basket was practiced. If you know of other locations in the USA or the world where May Baskets were "thrown," we would sure like to know about them. [Send us an email](#) with your story about throwing a May Basket.

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