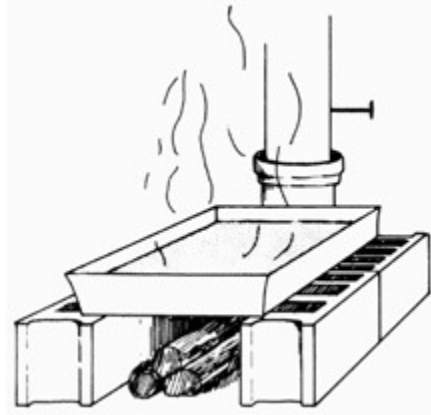


Make Your Own Maple Syrup!



Homemade Maple Syrup

Yes, if you have only a few sugar maple trees, you can make your own maple syrup and sugar. The basic method has not changed from the time of the Indians. You boil off the water in the sap to get the sweet syrup. It's work! But it is fun and rewarding.

What Will You Need?

1. A bitstock and a bit (any 7/16 inch bit will do) to bore the hole.

2. Spouts -(one for each hole) - manufactured spouts can be purchased from a maple equipment dealer or you can make them yourself. To make a wooden spout, select an elderberry stem a

little larger than the hole to be filled. Cut it off four or five inches long. Sharpen one end to go into the tap hole. Use a slender rod to push the pith or heart wood out of the center and you have your spout.



elderberry spout

3. One container per tap hole to catch the sap such as a bucket or wooden, metal, or plastic pail. Rusty cans or pails may be used by placing a plastic liner or polyfilm bag inside the container. Very serviceable containers can be made from plastic gallon milk or cider jugs. These work well in combination with a wood, metal, or plastic spout. Use a small electric drill or other cutting implement to make a hole in the top of the flat side of the jug. Enlarge the hole so that it can be slipped over the spout.



4. For storing freshly gathered sap use clean galvanized or plastic trash cans, large pails or the like.

5. Any deep metal pan like a canner or wash tub that will hold five gallons or more will serve as an evaporator pan for boiling the sap.

6. A fireplace or picnic arch in the back yard, even one temporarily made from brick, stone or cinder blocks to fit your boiling pan is adequate. A wood stove set up out of doors is also suitable. Don't use your kitchen stove indoors or you are sure to have trouble and a very high fuel bill.

7. Dry, fast-burning wood is essential to provide the heat necessary for boiling. Slab wood, dead trees, etc. are suitable, if dry.

8. For testing to see when the syrup is done you need a syrup or candy thermometer.

9. Finished syrup should be stored in clean metal containers or glass jars that will seal - canning jars are ideal.

10. Caution - Be sure all collecting, boiling, and storing containers are clean to avoid off-flavor and other problems.

How to Do It

1. Be sure your trees are sugar maples. Hard maple and rock maple are other names for the same tree. We do not use soft or red maple in Massachusetts for sugaring. A tree should be at least 10" in diameter for one tap hole and bucket. For every additional 8" in diameter another tap hole and bucket may be added. A tree 26" in diameter could have a setting of three buckets. Usually trees with lots of branches are better producers than those with small tops.

2. Drill the 7/16" hole 3" deep at a convenient height. Look for unblemished bark and do not bore directly over or under a former tap hole or closer than 4" from the side of an old tap hole. The hole does not have to be slanted.

3. Drive the spout in so that it is tight and can not be pulled out by hand, but don't over drive and split the tree.

4. Hang your bucket or container on the hook of the spout if it is a purchased one: or, if you have made your own, fashion a length of wire to serve as a hanger. Be sure to cover the bucket to keep out rain, snow and foreign material.

5. Make sure your fireplace is ready, wood at hand, and pan ready for the sap.

6. Sap has started to run. You have enough in your buckets to fill your pan for boiling - you are ready for the fire. Do not fill your pan to the top as it will boil over. A bit of butter or margarine rubbed at the top rim of the boiling pan will often keep it from boiling over. As the water boils away keep adding more sap to the pan. Do not have less than an inch in the pan or it may burn down. You can pour the cold sap right into the boiling sap. It will take a lot of boiling to get it to syrup as it takes about 10 gallons of sap to make one quart of maple syrup. A chimney of brick or stove pipe (4 to 6 feet long) on your arch or fireplace will be helpful in keeping the smoke away from the boiling sap so that the syrup will not darken or have an off-taste from the smoke.

7. Do not leave an accumulation of sap in the collecting buckets -especially in warm weather. Sap is like milk and will sour if left in the sun. Try to keep the sap in storage as cold as possible. Boil it as soon as you can.

8. Finished maple syrup will be 7 degrees F. above the temperature of boiling water at your elevation. Your syrup or candy thermometer will tell you this. If you have a larger operation you may get a syrup hydrometer and testing cup which will tell you when the syrup is done. The cup will require two or three cupfuls of syrup in order to make the test. Proper syrup will weigh at least 11 pounds per gallon. Do not get it beyond 11 1/4 pounds per gallon or it may form crystals in the bottom of the storage container.

9. Pour the hot syrup through a felt syrup filter or a special strainer as carried by equipment dealers. If you have neither one, a double layer of outing flannel may be used or, you may put the syrup in a container and let it cool for 12 hours or more. Sediment will settle to the bottom of the container and the clearer syrup may be carefully poured off. This syrup should then be reheated to at least 180 degrees or almost to boiling before it is poured into containers for final storage.

10. Pour the hot syrup into the clean, sterile canning jars and seal. Fill them full so that very little air will be in the jar. If laid on the side while cooling a better seal will result.

11. Store syrup in a cool place. A freezer is ideal. Properly prepared syrup will not freeze and a poor seal will not be as important when stored in a freezer.

12. You may also want to visit a commercial maple producer to pick up tips on how to make syrup. Most producers are friendly and will welcome your questions. Locations of producers can be obtained from your local Extension Service office.

