

## Maple Products

### Maple Syrup

If you don't like sweets, this page is definitely not for you! For everyone else, get ready for the wonderful story of maple syrup.

The sugar maple has a really interesting quirk: near the end of winter, its sap turns really sweet. And we humans aren't the only ones to know about it; a number of animals love it, too. Maple sugar contains between 2% to 4% of sugar on average, sometimes more. We have discovered a relatively easy way to extract the sap from sugar maples and turn it into sugar or syrup.

### A Brief History

Long before Europeans came to North America, the aboriginals were making sugar from sugar maple sap. They would use a knife or tomahawk to cut a hole in the bark of trees to let the sap flow. The sap was collected in containers made of birch bark. The containers were then emptied into hollowed out tree trunks. Hot rocks were put into the trunks to evaporate the water from the sap. The sugar was then recovered from the bottom of the trunks. What a treat! This was the only source of sugar for Amerindians in the Northeast.

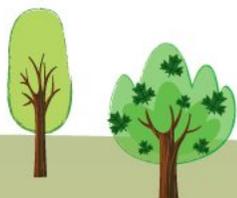
The aboriginals shared their secret with the newly-arrived Europeans. The techniques for extracting and processing the sap have evolved. Maple syrup production has turned into an industry worth millions of dollars.

### The Sap Flow

The sweet sap from maples can only be harvested for a few weeks in the spring. The days must be warm and the nights cold (below freezing). And the buds can't be out.

### From Sap to Syrup

Sap contains about 2% sugar, 97% water, and 1% other constituents. To turn it into



syrup, you have to reduce the water content in the sap by evaporating the water. The cooking also develops the distinctive maple flavor. If not enough water is removed (not cooked long enough), the syrup could ferment. If too much water is evaporated off (boiled for too long), the syrup will crystallize.

## Maple By-products

If the cooking doesn't stop once syrup has been made, you wind up with maple butter, soft sugar, hard sugar, or taffy. Syrup can also be used to make candy or jelly.

## Other Trees with Sweet Sap

Both the red maple and silver maple have sweet sap from which syrup is occasionally produced. The black maple, although rarer than the sugar maple, has sap that is just a sweet. Did you know that birch sap is also somewhat sweet? How would you like to try a little birch syrup on pancakes for breakfast?

What are your favorite maple recipes?

