

# Maple Sugaring at Home

Today you will learn how to collect sap and turn it into maple syrup at home. We will pay special attention to keeping the process safe and preventing damage to your trees.

## **Selecting the right trees:**

- Both Sugar Maples and Red (Swamp) Maple can be tapped
- It is easiest to identify trees in summer or fall when leaves are on
- Look at the bark. Sugar maple bark forms “plates” as the tree ages
- Look at the buds. Maples have “opposite branching”. Most tree species have alternate branching.
- Determine if tree is healthy enough to tap. Avoid trees with large broken branches, cracks or large dead sections.
- Consider the tree’s diameter. A Maple should not be tapped until it has reached 10-12 inches in diameter at chest height.

## **When should I tap my maples?**

- Typical season starts in late February to late March (often first week of March.)
- Duration is usually 4-6 weeks
- A maple tree can seal off a tap whole in 6 weeks so don’t tap to early.
- Watch the thermometer: When daytime temps are >40 F and nighttime temps drop to heigh 20s F it may be time tap

## **How do I tap my trees?**

- Supplies: you will need spouts (taps), a cordless drill, a sharp drill bit (either 5/16 or 7/16 depending on the size of you spouts) a hammer, buckets and lids.
- Determine how many spouts your tree can support
- Drill bit should be sharp and clean. Drill 1.5 to 2 inches deep and at a slight upward angle, chest height, max of 3 spouts per tree.
- Clear hole and tap in spout with a hammer. Should be too tight to pull out by hand

Diameter	Circumference	Number of spouts
10-17 inches	31-53 inches	1x
18-24 inches	57-75 inches	2x
25+ inches	79+ inches	3x

### **What do I do with all this sap I've collected?**

- Filter sap through a cheese cloth
- Sap can be stored for a week or longer if kept cool and out of the sun
- Do not use sap that has turned cloudy as it may have spoiled
- Start boiling outside, finish inside

### **How much syrup will I get?**

- 35-40 gallons of sap from a sugar maple yield one gallon of syrup. 50-60 gallons of sap from a Red Maple yields about 1 gallon of syrup.

- 

### **How do I know when my syrup is syrup?**

- Temp at sea level should be 219-220 degrees F. or 7.5 degrees above boiling

### **How do I preserve my syrup?**

- Properly jarred syrup is good for a year or more on the shelf. Where as uncanned syrup can last up to 6 months if kept in the fridge.
- Pour hot syrup into sterilized jars. Add lid and ring and let cool.

### **How do I know when the season is done?**

- Signs the season is coming to an end: sap flow slows, turns a yellowish color or develops a bitter taste, or the tree puts out buds.
- At the end of the season clean all equipment and store for next year.

**Enjoy your syrup and healthy trees!**

Tim Laflam, [talafam@hotmail.com](mailto:talafam@hotmail.com)

Good resources:

UMaine cooperative extension has a great online database and how-to videos online

*The Sugarmaker's Companion* by Michael Farrell

*The North American Maple Syrup Producers Manual*