

For many many years, people have been tapping trees to collect sap in late winter/early spring when the sap begins to rise as trees prepare for a new season of growth. A spile is a spout inserted into a tree to draw off the sap. Indigenous people of North America made spiles from elder or sumac to help them harvest the sap from maple trees in order to make maple syrup¹. They shared these methods with European settlers. With respect to those who passed on this knowledge and to the trees who give us their sap, here's how to make a spile out of sumac for tapping tree sap.

1. Honourably harvest² a straight branch of staghorn sumac about the same diameter as your thumb. NOTE: make sure to correctly identify the tree first! There is such thing as poison sumac, though it looks very different.
2. Cut the branch into smaller sections about 4-5 inches long.
3. Choose a piece where the pith (the spongy inside) is large enough in diameter to enable the flow of liquid (about the size of a straw). NOTE: You can use any extra pieces as beads or for other creative crafts! Also sumac berries make a delicious lemonade...
4. Push the pith out using something like a chopstick or tent peg.
5. Make sure to push the pith out entirely so the section is completely hollow.
6. Check the passage way is clear of debris.
7. Optional: you can peel the bark off to make it smoother in texture.
8. Using secateurs, cut one end at a diagonal. You may also want to taper the other end using a knife, this can make it easier when hammering the spile into the tree.
9. Find a suitable and healthy tree for tapping. Say hello to the tree! Ask it if it's willing to share some of its sap. Listen. If the tree says yes to sharing, drill a hole at a slight upward angle, just a bit smaller than the diameter of your spile. (I recommend looking up more information about what trees to tap in your area, what size they should be, how deep to drill the hole, etc. to minimize harm to trees³).
10. Hammer in your spile and attach a bucket below.
11. Check your bucket in the coming days and remove your spile when you've finished tapping. Say thank you to the tree.
12. Enjoy making syrup or something else delicious with the sap! We boiled it and drank it like a tea ☺



¹ See <http://www.native-art-in-canada.com/how-to-make-maple-syrup.html>

² Robin Wall Kimmerer (2013), *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants*, p. 183

³ For example, see <https://tapmytrees.com/tap-tree/>