

Vermont's Sweetest Harvest

Spring is in the air and maple sugarmakers have started *boiling*. Although Vermont usually makes half a million gallons of maple syrup annually, March was colder than normal this year, so it may not be a good year. Maple trees need warm days and cold nights to yield sap. We have lots of cold nights, but not so many the warm days.

Sugaring has changed a lot, but collecting sap and making syrup is still hard work, requiring many long hours of labor in a six week season.

Some farmers collect sap in buckets and use a truck, horse, or ATV to gather sap to bring it to the sugarhouse. A healthy tree in an open field can yield 22 gallons of sap per season, while a tree in a forest gives half that. Collecting sap is very labor intensive and must be done at least every 48 hours.

Many people use plastic tubing with gravity or a vacuum to get the sap to the sugarhouse. Wildlife can damage the tubing, though: squirrels chew it and deer knock it down.

After the sap has been collected, it needs to be filtered to remove debris. Then the process of evaporating and producing syrup begins. It takes 43 gallons of sap to make a gallon of syrup—42 gallons of water need to be removed from the sap. Traditionally, sugarmakers boil sap in the sugarhouse, making sweet maple scented clouds of steam. As the sap evaporates, it thickens and looks like hundreds of golden bubbles. The syrup is

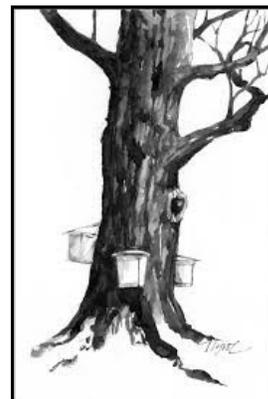
ready when the thermometer in the pan reaches 219°.

Boiling sap requires a lot of fuel. Many sugarmakers cut wood from their woodlots and others buy oil. Some also capture steam to preheat the sap.

Since the 1970s larger sugaring operations began using reverse osmosis, which can remove up to 75% of the water from the sap before it goes into the evaporator. But the equipment is expensive and only economical for large operations, where it can reduce energy use to about a gallon of heating oil per gallon of syrup.

Instead of making their own syrup, some landowners collect sap and sell it to larger manufacturers. Depending on quality, sap sells from 10-70 ¢ per gallon. A gallon of syrup costs at least \$38.

When you consider all the work that goes into making it, you can see why real Vermont maple syrup costs more than the maple flavored corn syrup. It tastes a lot better, too. Maple syrup contains essential minerals, like calcium, potassium and iron.. A 1/4 cup of syrup has the same amount of antioxidants as a raw carrot. So enjoy your pancakes with a healthy sweetener and support your fellow Vermonters who worked hard to put it on your table.



Recipe for Maple Pie

From the Vermont Maple Sugarmakers Association

Ingredients:

- 1 1/2 cups heavy cream
- 1 1/2 cups pure Vermont Maple Syrup
- 1/4 teaspoon black pepper
- 1/3 cup all purpose flour
- 2 tablespoons butter
- 1 - 9 in unbaked pie shell

In a heavy saucepan, whisk together cream & flour until smooth.

Add maple syrup, butter & pepper.

Cook stirring over medium heat for 10 minutes or until thickened. Do not let the mixture boil.

Pour filling into pie shell & sprinkle with chopped walnuts.