Topic Page: Maple Syrup

Image from: **To collect maple sap, farmers drill holes 2 to 3...** in *The Greenwood Encyclopedia of American Regional Cultures: New England*

Summary Article: **MAPLE SYRUP**
from *Encyclopedia of American Food and Drink*

A sweet syrup or sugar made from the sugar maple tree (*Acer saccharum*), also called the "hard maple" or "rock maple." The word is from Old English *mapel.* Although Europeans were familiar with various species of maple trees in their own countries, they were unaware of the American sugar maple's virtues as an agent for such a delicious sweetener as the northeastern Native Americans obtained merely by slashing the bark and letting the sap drip out. This technique was learned by the early colonists, who found maple syrup and maple sugar a fine substitute for the expensive cane sugar imported from the West Indies. By the 1720s the settlers were doing a good deal of "sugaring" of maple trees, waiting for the sudden thaw of late winter, when the sap would begin flowing through the trees. The colonists would gash the tree trunks, guide the sap into troughs, and boil it over fires.

Maple sweeteners became even more popular after the passage of the 1764 Sugar Act, which imposed high duties on imported sugar. "Maple syrup" first appeared in American print in 1792. After the Revolution, New England maple production boomed, providing products like maple candy, beer, wine, and molasses. Abolitionists urged their fellow citizens to eat more maple sugar than West Indian sugar, in order to "reduce by that much the lashings the Negroes have to endure to grow cane sugar to satisfy our gluttony." In New Hampshire, people called maple syrup "humbo," from an Indian word.

Maple products remained principal forms of sweetening well into the nineteenth century, especially after tin cans became available in which to pack the syrup. Before then, most maple was turned into sugar loaves. Today, most of the maple sugar and syrup produced comes from Vermont, though a good deal of the syrup used on American foods like pancakes is no longer maple syrup at all. In 1887, P. J. Towle, of St. Paul, Minnesota, produced a blend of maple and sugarcane syrup that was less expensive than pure maple syrup. He packed it in a tin can shaped like a log cabin of the kind his childhood hero, Abraham Lincoln, had grown up in, and called it Log Cabin Syrup. Since then, many syrups have been produced from other sweeteners, and these by law must be labeled "pancake syrups."

The sugaring of maple trees has long been a New England social ritual. Both professional and amateur sugarers will head for a grove of maple trees, called a "sugar bush," to collect the sap, return to a "sugarhouse" to boil it down, and hope for a "sugar snow"—that is, a late snowfall that prolongs the running of the sap in the trees. It takes about thirty-five gallons of boiling sap to produce one gallon of syrup. Often a late-season "sugar in the snow" party is held, during which maple syrup is poured on fresh snow and eaten like an ice.

Maple syrup is graded "fancy" (the finest), "grade A," "grade B," and "unclassified," a dark syrup used in commercially produced maple and blended syrups.

Maple sweeteners are used on breakfast dishes like pancakes, waffles, French toast, bacon, and sausage and in candies, cakes, ice cream, and many other confections. Vermont and New York produce more than two-thirds of the country's maple syrup. In 1998, total U.S. production of maple syrup was

1.159 million gallons.

MAPLE SUGAR

Boil 1 pt. maple syrup, then reduce heat to a simmer and stir for about 10 min., until candy thermometer registers 240°. Cool by stirring over a pot of cold water until it thickens to light taffy stage. Return to medium heat to liquefy again, pour into candy or other molds, cool for 15 min., and turn out.

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