The Wild Center Maple FAQ

Q: What types of maple trees are best for making maple syrup?

A: The best maple tree is the sugar maple because it produces the sweetest sap. You can also tap black maple, silver maple, red maple, and Norway maple, but the sap typically contains less sugar.

Q: How long does a maple tree need to grow before it can be tapped?

A: A maple tree must be at least 10”-12” in diameter before it can be tapped. A maple tree can take 40 years to reach this size.

Q: Does collecting sap harm the maple tree?

A: No, tapping a maple tree properly does no harm to the tree; it will remain productive for years to come. Studies show that tapped trees grow just as big as untapped trees. Maple trees produce more sap than they need each season, which is why they are able to share some with us.

Q: How much sap does one tree produce in a single year?

A: A maple tree will produce between 10-20 gallons of sap in one season depending on the tree, the weather, the length of the season, and the collection method.

Q: When does the maple season occur?

A: Maple syrup has a specific season of production which begins in the late winter or early spring and lasts between 4-6 weeks. Maple sap only runs from the tree when there are freezing nights followed by warmer days. The season typically starts in Late February or Early April and runs through late April or early May.

Q: What causes the sap to rise?

A: When the temperature drops below freezing, suction develops, drawing water into the tree from the ground, replenishing the sap stores. During warm periods when the temperature is above freezing, pressure develops in the tree causing the sap to flow out of the tap hole.

Q: How do you tap a tree and what equipment is needed?

A: To tap a tree you first need to identify a mature maple tree, 10-12 inches in diameter. Next drill a hole with a 7/16 or 5/16 drill bit into the tree about 2 to 2 ½ inches deep. The shavings from the drill should be white in color, indicating that you’ve drilled into healthy sapwood. Next insert the spile, a specialized spout for tapping trees, and gently tap it into the tree. Hang your bucket or bag on the spout and wait for the sap to drip. Equipment needed: Mature tree, drill, 7/16 or 5/16 drill bit, spile, small hammer, and a bucket with a lid or a bag.
Q: How much sap does it take to make syrup?

A: It takes between 40-43 gallons of maple sap to produce one gallon of maple syrup depending on the sugar content of the sap.

Q: How is maple syrup made?

A: Once sap has been collected from maple trees it must be processed into maple syrup. The sap is boiled in a pan called an evaporator, which slowly removes water from the sap turning it into syrup. Here at The Wild Center, and many other sugarhouses, the sap is first run through a reverse osmosis filter, which removes a percentage of water from the sap, decreasing its boiling time in the evaporator.

Q: What is the difference between syrup grades?

A: A new grading system is currently being implemented for maple syrup. All the syrup is Grade A with four levels defined by color and flavor. From light to dark: golden color with delicate taste, amber color with rich taste, dark color with robust taste, and very dark color with strong taste. The color and flavor of the syrup vary based on when it is produced during the season. Lighter syrup is produced early in the season and it gets darker as the season progresses.

Q: Is maple syrup produced all over the United States? The world?

A: Maple syrup is primarily produced in the Northeastern United States and Eastern Canada. Technically, maple syrup can be produced in any state with maple trees and a freeze-thaw cycle, but Eastern North America offers the best climate and forests for syrup production, with Vermont, Maine, and New York producing the most syrup in the US. Globally, Canada is the largest maple producer, followed by the US.

Q: Is maple syrup good for you?

A: Yes, maple syrup is 100% natural and full of minerals and nutrients, including riboflavin, manganese, zinc, magnesium, calcium, and potassium. However, it is a source of sugar and therefore should be consumed in moderation.

Q: Can you tap other trees besides maples?

A: Yes, there are many other tree varieties that can be tapped. The most popular include walnut, birch, and sycamore trees.

Q: Can you substitute maple syrup for white sugar?

A: Yes, maple syrup can be substituted for white sugar when cooking or baking. Replace equal parts maple syrup for white sugar but reduce the amount of liquid in the recipe by 3 tablespoons for every cup of syrup used.

Q: What is sugar on snow and how is it made?

A: Sugar on snow is a popular treat where heated maple syrup is poured directly onto snow. The syrup solidifies into a thin, taffy-like sheet because there is not enough time for it to crystallize. To make sugar on snow heat maple syrup roughly 22-27°F above the boiling point of water (212°F) and pour onto snow.

Q: What other products can be made from maple syrup?

A: Pure maple syrup can be turned into maple sugar, maple candy, or maple cream, simply by boiling the syrup to a higher temperature and cooling it at different intervals. Maple syrup can also be incorporated into other confections and foods, including maple coated nuts, maple fudge, maple cotton candy, maple jelly, maple BBQ sauce, maple mustard, and maple vinaigrette, to name a few.