

Maple Syrup

Have the maple trees along the train tracks in central Illinois surprised you yet with their sweet presence? The world's best syrup is made from Sugar Maple Trees which grow in Illinois, Michigan and across the Northeast United States and Eastern Canada. The sap of the Sugar Maple Tree contains more sugar than any other tree and has a distinctive buttery flavor that many people crave, which makes it ideal for making syrup and candy.

Unlike typical harvest periods which occur in the fall, maple sap is collected in February and March. Maple trees remain dormant all winter, but on sunny spring days the light amber colored tree sap flows up from the roots of the tree into the trunk and branches. This is the ideal time for tapping the sweet sap. Small holes are drilled into the maple trunks and spouts are inserted and connected by plastic hosing to a container. The hard work of collecting gallons of sap must be done daily so that the fresh sap can be processed. The holes quickly heal after the harvest season to keep the tree healthy and able to produce sweet sap for many decades.

After the maple sap has been collected, it is heated and simmered to evaporate excess liquid. It takes about forty gallons of tree sap to produce one gallon of pure maple syrup.

The evaporation process yields rich, thick syrup with a complex, irresistible taste.

Did you know that the European settlers learned this practice from Native Americans? The Native Americans actually dehydrated the sap to a point where it became crystalline maple sugar, so it could be easily transported in leather pouches without spoiling. American colonists also produced maple sugar crystals, thereby ending their dependence on foreign sugar.

Canada produces eighty percent of the world's maple syrup, and the other twenty percent is made right here in the U.S.A. So let your eyes be amazed by the scenic beauty of these maple forests and hopefully you'll find a chance to taste some homegrown maple syrup!

Source(s):

Michigan Maple Syrup.net. (2006). Making Maple Syrup. Retrieved January 4, 2011 from <http://www.michiganmaplesyrup.net/>.

New England Maple Museum. (2011). Indians and the Early Maple Sugaring Process. Retrieved January 4, 2011 from <http://www.maplemuseum.com/indians-and-early-maple-sugaring-process> .

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