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Taste

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Keely Wygonik adlr/953-2105



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taste buds

chef Larry Janes

Syrup harvest begins

All it took was the 'ol groundhog crawling out of his hole and seeing his shadow, forecasting six more weeks of winter.

MEANWHILE, NORTH American maple syrup makers are getting ready to begin "suckin' the sap" and turning out pure maple syrup faster than ever to meet the demand.

Collecting of the sap commences in the spring when warm days begin to follow cool nights, causing the sap of the sugar maple to flow. During the winter, some of the starch that the tree made the previous year is converted to sugar.

PRIMARILY, THE sap contains four to 10 percent sugar. Collected sap is boiled to concentrate the sugar and produce the characteristic flavor. Maple syrup is esteemed for its sweet taste and "maple" flavor. Interestingly, the maple flavor of the syrup is not present in the sap, but develops during the boiling.

Harvesting sap from the "sugar bush" — the strands of maple trees — is a rather picturesque operation in many places. Quebec is the world's leading maple syrup producer, converting more than 60 million gallons of sap into more than 30 million gallons of syrup yearly.

THE UNITED STATES' production will be lucky to tap off the million gallons which will be made by small independent producers and sold as "tourist items."

To collect the running sap, holes are drilled into the tree about two to three inches deep, about three feet above the ground. The number of holes depends on the size of the tree — larger trees sport four to five holes.

Into each hole, a metal spout is fitted and a collection pail is hung below the spout. Each day, the accumulation of sap is collected from the pails, poured into a larger tank, and hauled by sled or wagon to the sugarhouse.

A more modern method of collecting the sap involves a system of plastic pipelines which transports the sap from a hole tapped into a tree to the sugarhouse. Regardless of the method of collection, a good maple tree will yield 15 to 40 gallons of sap in a single season.

Procession occurs in the sugarhouse. It is here that the sap is strained and then placed in shallow pans (evaporators) over wood, oil or gas fires. As the sap boils, the water evaporates.

When the sugar concentration reaches 66.5 percent, it is drawn off, filtered and bottled as maple syrup. Maple sugar is produced by further boiling and evaporation of most of the water.

One gallon of syrup yields about eight pounds of sugar. An old-fashioned treat enjoyed by those making maple syrup is called "jack wax," a taffy-like confection formed by pouring the hot syrup into a mound of clean snow. The syrup hardens into a stringy treat and is usually made with the first "draw" of the syrup.

A SINGULAR harbinger of spring, maple syrup is also a unique cooking ingredient. It's a gift of unrefined sweetness and rich flavor in both liquid and sugar forms, turns hams and potatoes into a regal dish, including bread and cake with character. It even tastes great from the can or bottle when poured over ice cream.

If you think you have to venture to Quebec or New England to observe the making of real maple syrup, you might be surprised to find small orchards within driving distance in Troy and Bloomfield Hills. (see related story).

See recipes inside.

By Gail Rinachler
special writer

THE SKUNK cabbage is blooming, and the days are getting warmer. The nights, hopefully, will stay just below freezing.

ASK SUSAN Raymer, a naturalist at the Lloyd A. Stage, outdoor education center in Troy, and she'll explain "that these are all indications the maple trees are ready to be tapped."

She, along with other naturalists and maple sugar makers in southern Michigan, are getting ready to collect the sap to make maple syrup, sugar, and cream.

A TRULY authentic North American luxury, maple syrup is usually collected in Michigan in March during what is described as the first thaw and continues for four to five weeks until the first leaf buds appear.

"At this point, the sap will carry a substance which will give the syrup a harsh flavor," said Raymer.

As the outdoor education center begins its 10th annual Maple Syrup Time, the public is invited to watch the process from tree to syrup, as well as taste the final product, (see related story inside).

PURE MAPLE syrup is made in the northeastern United States, and southeastern Canada as it has been for over 100 years.

The equipment in most places has been updated except in Dearborn at Greenfield Village where sap is gathered as it would have been in the 1850s at the historic Firestone farmhouse.

"The Village workers will go out dressed in period costumes in horse-drawn wagons and pour the sap into wooden barrels," said Margaret Johnson, the museum's regional media specialist.

At the Village, they only use traditional methods and tools, she said. The metal taps or spiles used were reproduced in the Village for the process.

Beginning Wednesday, March 18, the sap will be collected, poured into an apparatus at the farm for skimming the residue, then brought into the farmhouse for cooking down into syrup.

The finished product is then poured into canning jars and stored to be used in cooking throughout the year.

The naturalists at the Cranbrook Institute of Science in Bloomfield Hills have been making maple syrup and maple sugar for 19 years.



JOHN ZOLYNSKY/staff photographer

Maura Lobos, a naturalist at the Cranbrook Institute of Science in Bloomfield Hills, collects sap to make maple syrup. The institute's annual Maple Syrup Festival runs Saturdays and Sundays through March 22.

IF YOU'D like to learn how to identify the various maple trees, and hike through the sugar bush (the group of trees being tapped as a crop for producing syrup), visit the Cranbrook Institute of Science during Maple Syrup Festival, Saturdays and Sundays through March 22.

Naturalists will discuss the history of syrup making and demonstrate the process.

"About 100 taps are set up in the sugar bush," said Maura Lobos, naturalist. Besides sugar maples, they will tap a few Norway Maples, Black Walnut and Box Elder trees.

"The weather plays an important

role in syrup making," said Lobos. "The sugar content is generally the highest during the first run."

The early syrups are the lightest in color because of the high sugar content, she added. This is a labor intensive crop to harvest and process. On the average, 40 gallons of sap will yield only one gallon of syrup.

NOW, IF you're thinking about trying this at home, there are a few things you should know before you begin. Although any maple tree can be tapped, you'll need to tap at least four to five trees to collect enough syrup for pancakes.

"About one gallon of collected sap will yield about 1/4 cup of maple syrup," said Raymer. "Cooking down the sap will take several hours, and the sap must be cooked to 7 degrees past the boiling point using a candy thermometer."

"When it reaches the point of syrup, it must then be removed from the heat immediately. If the syrup is left unattended for a moment, it can easily cause a fire."

If you're still game, metal spiles for tapping trees and a booklet on how to make maple syrup are available for purchase in the gift shop at the Cranbrook Institute of Science

along with maple syrup and maple candy.

The delicate flavor of maple syrup enhances a variety of recipes which require a sweetener such as muffins, custards and cakes.

You can use syrup in place of honey to glaze a ham, or drizzle it over apples in place of brown sugar before baking.

But when I asked the naturalists interviewed for their favorite maple syrup recipe, they all agreed, "over ice cream."

See recipes and places to learn about maple syrup making inside.

Meal ideal for entertaining

family tested
winner
dinner
Betsy
Brethen

Members of the Cranbrook House and Garden Auxiliary are thrilled and elated with the success of their first cookbook "Cranbrook Reflections."

Leaving through this beautiful book, it comes as no surprise that it was the third place winner of the National Community Cookbook Award in the 1991 Tabasco Community Cookbook Awards Competition.

THANKS in part to Balhazar Korab's magnificent color photographs of Cranbrook House and its surrounding gardens, the book is visually appealing and filled with delicious recipes that are bound to whet your appetite as well as enhance your culinary repertoire.

Included in the hard cover cookbook are recipes for two of the auxiliary's most popular gift items at their twice yearly plant sales, Michigan Navy Bean Soup Mix and Fragrant Tussy Mussu Potpourri. As a special reminder, be sure to mark your calendar for their upcoming spring plant sale May 13 and 14.

This week's Winner Dinner, submitted by Joan West, consists of recipes taken from the cookbook. Selected with ease and elegance in mind, her menu for marinated pork loin, roasted rosemary potato slices and Bloomfield Winter Salad, achieves both objectives, and is ideal for entertaining or a special dinner.

West, a resident of Orchard Lake for 21 years, is married and the mother of four grown children. She worked at Standard Federal Bank for 14 years as a savings counselor and retired two years ago. Now, her many activities keep her busier than ever.



JOHN BYROMZAND/staff photographer

Joan West presents marinated pork loin, roasted rosemary potato slices, and Bloomfield winter salad, elegant dishes selected from "Cranbrook Reflections."

West was involved with the marketing staff for the cookbook which is going to be sold locally and nationally. She recently took on the job of public relations for the cookbook.

So far, West has found the experience to be very gratifying as everyone who has seen the cookbook has bought it. She is a past president of the Cranbrook Gardens Auxiliary and has held many other positions within this volunteer organization.

"CRANBROOK REFLECTIONS" is available locally at Hudson's, bookstores and specialty shops. For more information, call the Cranbrook House and Gardens Auxiliary, 643-3149.

Submit recipes to be considered for publication to: Winner Dinner, P.O. Box 3503, Birmingham, 48012.

WINNER DINNER

Recipes

MARINATED PORK LOIN

(serves 4)

2 pounds pork loin, trimmed

• Marinade

2 large cloves of garlic, minced

1 teaspoon coarse (kosher) salt

1 tablespoon thyme

1 tablespoon basil

2 teaspoons sugar

parsley

cayenne pepper

1 tablespoon Dijon mustard

1 tablespoon oil

1 teaspoon vinegar

Mix all the marinade ingredients until well blended. Spread over pork loin in a nonaluminum pan. Cover with plastic wrap.

Refrigerate 12 hours to 2 days. Return to room temperature before baking. Preheat oven to 325 degrees. Roast until internal temperature measures 150 degrees, approximately 1 1/2 hours, or 160 degrees for no pinkness. Transfer to cutting board, cover with foil, and rest 15 minutes before slicing. Deglaze roasting pan with one-half cup water. Bring to boil, thicken with flour and water mixture.

ROASTED ROSEMARY POTATO SLICES

(serves 4)

5 tablespoons unsalted butter, melted

4 russet (baking) potatoes (about 1 1/2 pounds), scrubbed

1 teaspoon coarse (kosher) salt

1 teaspoon combined dried rosemary (or 2 teaspoons finely chopped fresh) freshly ground pepper to taste

Preheat oven to 425 degrees. Pour half the butter into an 8-inch baking pan, making sure it covers the entire bottom. Cut the potatoes into one-quarter-inch-thick slices. In the pan, layer the potatoes in separate rows,

separating the slices slightly. Sprinkle with salt, rosemary, and pepper. Drizzle the remaining butter over the potatoes. Bake in the oven at the oven, turning each row once with a long thin spatula, for 45 minutes to 1 hour, until they are crisp and golden.

BLOOMFIELD WINER SALAD

(serves 6)

• Dressing

1/2 cup sugar

1 teaspoon salt

1 teaspoon d. y. prika

1 teaspoon d. y. mustard

1/2 teaspoon pepper

1 cup fresh lemon juice

1 teaspoon celery seed

1 tablespoon diced onion

1 large or 2 medium cloves of garlic

2 tablespoons honey

• cup light vegetable oil

Combine all ingredients in a blender and mix until smooth. Make 1 1/2 cups of salad dressing. Extra dressing, stored in the refrigerator, keeps for weeks.

• Salad

1 head romaine lettuce, washed, dried, torn into pieces

2 oranges, peeled and cut into sections without pith

1 grapefruit, peeled and cut into sections without pith

garlic salt, to taste

salt and pepper, to taste

1 red onion, peeled and thinly sliced

1 ripe avocado, peeled and sliced

Toss together romaine lettuce, oranges, and grapefruit. Sprinkle salad with a little garlic salt, salt and pepper. Toss with salad dressing. Arrange red onion rings and avocado wedges on top of salad.