

**outdoors**

# Get your gear ready to tap the maple syrup

By Lem Meese outdoors writer

There may be a yard of snow on the ground, but it's not too early to think of spring, the rising sap and maple sugar. "It's not too soon to get your materials together. The first sap that runs makes the best syrup," said Dave Moilanen, naturalist at Kensington Metropark.

If you have a few maple trees in your yard, you might want to take advantage of tapping them to enjoy the experience of making your own syrup. A PROGRAM called "Making Maple Syrup" will be held at 7 p.m. Thursday at the Farm Center at the north end of Kensington Metropark. Take the Kent Lake Road exit from I-96.

The fee is \$1 per person, and you should register in advance by calling park offices at 885-9185 or 655-1561. During the one-hour program, Moilanen will demonstrate how to convert sap into syrup. He'll also show the equipment needed and discuss the basic steps of making maple syrup in a small-scale operation. "It's a dry-run class. The best time to do the tapping is after the first thaw, and this program is to get people ready for it," Moilanen said.

IDEAL TAPPING days are sunny with 40 degree temperatures. Because the process is so time-consuming, Moilanen said people usually

try tapping once or twice "for the fun of it."

During the special program, Moilanen will explain how to make the expensive equipment used in the syrup process.

"They'll need a stove to boil the sap outside. You shouldn't do it inside because the moisture from the boiling very often will cause the wallpaper to peel off," he said.

"Some people have used charcoal grills, and a lot have made stoves out of 55 gallon drums," he added.

Other pieces of equipment needed are:

- Braces and drill bits to make holes in the trees.
- Spouts for the sap to run out of the trees.
- Collection pails attached to each spout.
- A larger bucket (five gallon) to collect the sap from tree to tree.

And a thermometer and hydrometer to be used when the sap is boiling into syrup.

"IF A PERSON has two to three maple trees, he can usually end up with a gallon of maple syrup," Moilanen said. "It takes 35-45 gallons of sap to make one gallon of syrup."

Moilanen added that if a tree can run sap all day long through two or three taps, about five to six gallons of sap can be collected.

The sap can be stored in a cool dry place for a couple of days before it is boiled, he explained.

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