



## Maple Syrup Information

**Many consider maple syrup the season's first crop. Here are some ideas for how to enjoy this sweet treat.**

Courtesy Oven Fresh According to the University of Minnesota Extension Service, maple syrup is produced in 14 northern states and four Canadian provinces.

If you're lucky enough to be living in one of those areas, you have a unique opportunity to try your hand at harvesting the year's first official crop.

It's pretty easy to get started; all you need is a bucket or two, a couple of taps, a thermometer, a large pot for boiling and of course, maple trees.

February is when sugarhouses typically set their taps and begin collecting the sweet liquid that starts to flow as the days warm and the nights remain cold.

It takes 40 to 50 gallons of sap to yield 1 gallon of syrup in a very long boiling process not done on a standard kitchen stove.

Serious hobbyists and the pros have special boilers and evaporators to do the job in enclosed buildings over some type of stove. Some of the maple-syrup enthusiasts I know occasionally get together with neighbors for a day-long sap boil over an open fire. **What Do Maple Syrup Farmers Do with Their Product?**

After a day of cooking, how do you know when it's done?

Jim Burns, a small maple producer in Harvard, Mass., says that when the temperature of the sap reaches about 220 degrees F, it should be about the right color and consistency to qualify as maple syrup. (Technically, he says, the target temperature should be 7 degrees above the boiling point of water on the day of the boil, since the boiling point of water is affected by atmospheric conditions and can vary from day to day.)

Because Burns sells his syrup to the public, he has to use a hydrometer to ensure the syrup is at the proper density; but for a hobbyist just starting out, he says, the temperature method is fine.

Burns makes about 50 gallons of the amber ambrosia each year and always sells out since he's in a niche market with few other sugarhouses in the area.

He says he could easily expand if he wanted to—the demand is definitely there, especially given the increase in interest among consumers for locally produced foods.

Burns sells his syrup to a few stores near his home—Doe Orchards in Harvard and Amy's Provisions in Ayer; he also sells some out of his home. He doesn't usually ship the syrup because there's not enough left, but he will fill orders based on availability. (Burns doesn't have a website, but takes orders at 978-456-8349.)

Brown Family Farm in Brattleboro, Vt., however, does ship syrup, in addition to other maple-based products.

The farm helps support small, independent maple farmers in New England by purchasing and distributing their syrup, and by using it to create private-label products, such as maple candy, maple sugar and maple butter.

### How You Can Use Maple Syrup

Once you've got your maple syrup, what do you do with it?

There are only so many pancakes a person can eat, but it makes a creative addition to: Baked beans (start with a tablespoon at a time until you find the blend you like) and Apple pie (replace 1/4-cup of the sugar called for in your favorite recipe with maple syrup).

It also makes a fine glaze for: Baked winter squashes, such as butternut or acorn, and Fish like salmon or trout.

It can also be the star attraction at the dessert table. Try this recipe for Apple-maple Indian Pudding.



#### Grades of Maple Syrup

There are four grades of maple syrup: Grade A-Light: light-amber in color, with a mild flavor. From the earliest sap of the season; also the most expensive.

Grade A-Medium: medium amber in color; the most popular grade.

Grade A Dark: dark amber with a hearty flavor.

Grade B-Very Dark: with a robust flavor; used mostly by commercial manufacturers who add other ingredients to create "maple flavored" syrups; also the least expensive.