More about New York Maple Producers

More than 1500 commercial maple producers work within New York with many other hobbyists producing on a small scale. Their sugar bush operations range from fewer than 100 taps to almost 30,000 taps. The New York Maple Producers Association serves maple producers through educational programs and as a unified voice for the industry. Producers sponsor public events such as Maple Weekend, county and state fairs, and regional maple festivals. Cornell University and Cornell Cooperative Extension support producers through research and education. Many individual producers are open to the public during maple season and at other times of the year. All are very proud of what they do and willing to share their interest and knowledge with the public.

What’s Next?

For more information about maple syrup, contact your local office of Cornell Cooperative Extension or visit the Cornell Maple Program web site at http://maple.dnr.cornell.edu Also, visit the New York State Maple Producers Association web site for a list of maple producers in your region. On the first weekend after St. Patrick’s Day, the NYS Maple Producers Association hosts “Maple Weekend” – learn more about this event at www.mapleweekend.com
Sugar Bush

Pure and tasty New York maple syrup starts as sap within sugar maple trees. A grove of sugar maple trees tapped for sap is called a sugar bush. New York maple producers thin their sugar bush to increase sunlight to favor the biggest and best quality sugar maple trees. Cull trees cut in the sugar bush are either used for firewood in the sugarhouse, sold as logs for lumber, or left to provide habitat for wildlife. Trees with large and full crowns produce the most and the sweetest sap. Sugar concentration in the sap of most sugar maples is about 2%.

Sap Collecting and Processing

Maple trees in most of New York are tapped in February or March by drilling a small hole in the tree. Trees will have 1, 2 or 3 taps depending on size. A spile, or spout, is put in the tap hole. Spiles have buckets or plastic tubing attached to them. Sap is either poured from buckets or channeled through tubing into large tanks before it is processed in the sugarhouse.

Alternate freezing and thawing temperatures are required to produce a flow of sap from the tree. These conditions occur only on relatively few days (15 to 30 days) in the late winter or early Spring. Sap production is affected by tree vigor, genetics, and weather.

Sap is heated in evaporators, large cooking pans, to remove most of the water and to concentrate the sugar. Heat also causes the sugars and amino acids to produce the maple flavor and amber color. It takes about 40 gallons of sap to make a gallon of syrup. As sap moves through the evaporator the sugar concentration increases from about 2% to 66% when it is drawn off from the syrup pans. Reverse-osmosis technologies concentrate the sap to 8% sugar before entering the evaporator. This concentrating process reduces costs for fuel (wood or oil) and helps make lighter colored syrup. After syrup is collected from the evaporator, it is filtered and stored in air-tight barrels to preserve its quality and freshness.

Maple Grades

All New York maple syrup is classified by color from almost clear (light amber) to dark amber or extra dark. All contain the same amount of sugar. The color relates to the intensity of flavor. Some people enjoy the light colored and delicate flavored light amber, while other people prefer the darker and more robust dark amber or extra dark syrup. The most intense maple flavor is found in extra dark syrup for cooking. Maple syrup grades are standardized by New York State Agriculture and Markets.

Syrup Packaging and Other Maple Products

New York maple producers package their syrup for sale by re-heating and filtering the maple syrup and pouring it into containers of various sizes. Common sizes are pints and quarts. Maple syrup containers can vary from plastic, to coated tin, to glass. Many consumers who give New York maple syrup as gifts look for fancy glass or decorative containers. New York maple syrup should be kept available for regular use and makes a delightful gift.

Some maple producers will further refine their light amber syrup into other maple products. The techniques vary, but usually involve heating the syrup to a higher temperature and aggressively stirring. This processing further concentrates the sugar for an even sweeter New York treat. More than a dozen maple-related products are produced in New York. Popular examples include: maple cream, maple sugar (you call them “maple candy”), granulated maple sugar, maple lollipops, maple cotton candy, maple-mustard, maple coated nuts, and maple-jelly.