



St. Joseph County Parks

Tapping Trees at Home



Tapping trees at home can be a great family activity. A few tools are all that is needed to collect sap from the maple trees in your yard. A little bit of work will yield a sweet treat for your entire family!

For More Information or to Purchase Supplies...

Backyard Sugarin' by Rink Mann is a great guide for more detailed information on the "how-to's" of a backyard sugar bush.

Sugar Bush Supplies Co.
2611 Okemos Road
Mason, MI 48854
(517) 349-5185
(517) 349-3088 (fax)



St. Joseph County Parks

Bendix Woods County Park
32132 State Road 2
New Carlisle, IN 46552

Phone: (574) 654-3155
Fax: (574) 654-3674
www.sjcparks.org



Cooking Sap into Syrup

Tools for Cooking

-  A pan and heat source for boiling down.
-  A thermometer that reads 7° above the boiling point of water.
-  Wool, felt, orlon or other filters for filtering finished syrup while hot.
-  Canning jars for the finished syrup.

Boiling the Sap

Fill the evaporating container (preferably a large shallow pan or series of pans) with sap. Boil sap outdoors on an outdoor fireplace or grill or cook it in a turkey fryer. Have lots of dry wood or propane ready. Begin heating the sap to the boiling point, taking care not to burn or scorch the sap. As evaporation lowers the level of sap in the pan, add more sap. Continue this process until most of the sap in the pan is highly concentrated and the boiling point of the sap begins to rise above the boiling point of water. Cook the sap to 7° above the boiling point of water—this may take several hours to all day depending upon the amount of sap you have. Throughout this process, it may be necessary to skim the liquid to remove surface foam and other materials. When it is thickened you can finish off on a stove indoors.

Bottling the Syrup

Once the desired boiling point has been reached, the syrup is ready for filtering and packaging. Hot syrup should be filtered through a suitable filter of wool, felt or orlon to remove suspended particles. After filtering, the syrup should be bottled while hot. A temperature of at least 180°F is necessary to prevent spoiling while in storage.



Tapping Tidbits

 The best time of year to tap a tree in northern Indiana is during the months of February and March. The primary trigger for good sap flow is above freezing temperatures during the day and below freezing temperatures at night.

 Sugar maple and black maple are the most suitable trees for tapping.

 Guidelines for the number of taps to put into a tree:

- Trunk diameter 12-18 inches - 1 tap
- Trunk diameter greater than 18 inches - 2 taps

 If the tree has been tapped before, new tap holes should be six inches to the side or 24 inches above or below the unhealed tap holes. Any side of the tree can be tapped.

 A tap hole will heal in two to three years.

 Approximately 97-98% of sap is water and 2%-3% of it is sugar.

 Sap should be collected daily and kept cool or cooked as soon as possible, as it can spoil within a day or two, particularly if it gets too warm.



Guidelines for Tapping a Tree

Tools for Tapping



Drill with 5/16" or 7/16" bit. A power drill will work too.



Spile (can be made of plastic or metal). The size of the spile used will depend on the size of the drill bit used.



Collection container with lid. (Milk jugs or plastic buckets can be used for each tap hole.)

Identifying a Maple Tree



Maple trees have buds that are dark brown in color and look like upside down ice cream cones. They also have opposite branching.



How to Tap a Tree

1.  Drill a hole into the tree 2 1/2—3 inches deep.

2.   Hammer the spile into the tap hole.

3.  Hang the bucket on the spile.

4.  Place a lid on the bucket to keep out rain, snow, insects and other debris.