



STATE OF CONNECTICUT

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

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Connecticut's Maple Season: An Annual Winter Tradition

Hartford, CT— Warm days and cold nights are sweet—literally. These are the conditions that push maple trees' sugary sap up the trunk toward the leaves, rendering it available to the state's maple syrup producers.

When daytime temperatures stay below freezing, the plants convert starches into sugars in the roots. Once days warm up, the roots push that sap up toward the canopy. En route, taps placed in the tree by the syrupers divert some of it for the production of CT Grown maple syrup, sugar, and candy.

The taps do not harm the trees, nor does the removal of sap. Collectors limit tapping to trees at least 10 inches in diameter and in good health, and place only as many taps as the trees can bear without detriment.

"Syruping is a very sustainable practice," said Chuck Drake, Secretary of the Maple Syrup Producers Association of Connecticut (MSPAC). "Because we depend on these trees year after year, we monitor them carefully and adjust our tapping accordingly to ensure the trees maintain optimum health. It is good stewardship, of course, but it also is good business sense," he added.

Small-scale producers typically collect the sap in covered buckets that are carefully fastened to the tree and emptied when full. Larger-scale producers use elaborate tubing systems to transport the

sap directly to large collection tanks. On a good day, a single tap can yield a gallon of sap. Sap can be collected for about five to six weeks, depending on weather conditions, before the taps begin to dry up.

The sap comes out of the tree clear, resembling water. After it is collected, the sap is boiled to concentrate the sugars and make a thick liquid. Between 30 and 40 gallons are needed to produce one gallon of finished maple syrup.

The boiling process is done with a very large wood stove, called an evaporator, in a building known as a sugarhouse. Wood must be added round the clock to keep the temperature steady during the boiling process. Maple producers work long hours and get little sleep during this time.

The result of their labor is the delectable liquid amber that is used to top a steaming stack of buttermilk pancakes, stirred into a hearty bowl of oatmeal, or drizzled over scrumptious roasted root vegetables.

Connecticut ranks eleventh in the United States in terms of total number of taps (77,559), and produces 12,747 gallons of syrup annually. Though production trails significantly behind Vermont (which leads the nation with 560,200 gallons of syrup from 2,475,691 taps), the quality of Connecticut's syrup is second to none. In fact, twice in the last three years, a Connecticut producer's syrup has been named "Best Maple Syrup in the World" at Maple-Rama, an annual two-day workshop held in Vermont. Connecticut syrup has also received the award of Best Syrup at the North American Maple Syrup Council meetings conducted in New York.

Numerous sugarhouses around the state are open to the public and many give tours. For a list, go to the Connecticut Department of Agriculture's website at www.CTGrown.gov and click on "Publications."

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