

Relocated farmer

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Right now (at the end of Winter and the beginning of Spring) is the time of the year to tap the trees.

"The temperatures should be from 26 to 28 degrees at night and in the upper 40's to low 50's during the day for ideal conditions," explains Moshier. "But, you shouldn't have rain. Trees don't like rain."

To tap a tree, a hole about two inches deep and 7/16 in diameter is drilled into the bark. Then, a spout or spile is placed in the hole and a bucket is hung onto the hook on the spout. At this point, the tree is ready to be tapped.

The bucket stays on the tree during the entire season until the sap stops flowing, and the farmer visits each tree every day and collects whatever sap has been deposited in the buckets.

"Up in New York State you have to tramp through two to three feet of snow to collect from the trees," says Moshier.

"There are a lot of man hours involved," he continues, referring to the fact that 1000 or 1400 trees are involved.

Processing the sap also takes much work on the part of the farmer. Usually, the main piece of boiling equipment—the evaporator—is heated with wood, and that requires a lot of chopping and stoking until the job gets done.

Moshier has a miniature evaporator installed in his little sugar shanty. Just like a wood stove, the fire is made in the bottom of the two foot wide, four foot long metal evaporator and the actual boiling is done on top of it. The boiling area is sectioned off into several compartments, and like a labyrinth, the sap flows through the various compartments as the density changes throughout the boiling process.

To keep the cold sap flowing properly from the holding tank into the first compartment of the evaporator, a float is used to insure the liquid stays at a certain height.

The whole time the evaporating process is going on the syrup maker keeps chopping wood and stoking the fire as well as continuing to check the liquid to make sure it doesn't boil over.

"If it starts to boil too much, I put a little cream in it. That calms it down," says Moshier.

When the liquid has boiled a sufficient amount of time, the syrup is drained and filtered through a felt filter to make sure all impurities are removed. It is also checked with a hygrometer for the proper density.

"The two qualities that make a top product are the proper density and light color," says Moshier. "The lighter the color, the better."

The music teacher has found that in Pennsylvania he is unable to get as light a syrup as he could in New York state.

"The color is affected by the temperature, the way you process it, and the trees," he points out.

For good quality maple syrup, New Yorkers are getting anywhere from \$11 to

\$13 per gallon, which may sound expensive, but Moshier points out that it is definitely a pure food product with nothing imitation added.

Of course, there are lots of imitation maple syrup products which Moshier and his family don't like.

"It does taste different," he admits.

Although no one can go into maple syrup making in southeastern Pennsylvania, it is an invigorating hobby.

"It helps me get outside and take out my frustrations," says Moshier.

It also keeps his family stocked with the delicious maple syrup they like so much.

So, for this displaced New York state farmer, the time and the effort involved is worth the eight gallons.

"Nobody could do it for a profit, here," he admits. "But, I like it for a hobby."



After the sap has been boiled for several hours, the syrup becomes the proper density and is then drawn from the evaporator.



This sugar maple in Smoketown has three buckets hanging on it to gather the liquid sap from which maple syrup will be made.

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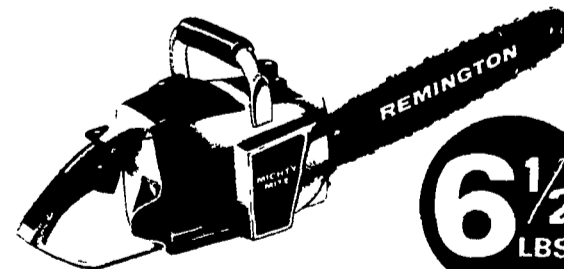
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