

Somerset Maple Sugar Season Ends With Festival

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MEYERSDALE (Somerset Co.) — The annual Pennsylvania Maple Festival — this year number 52 — is held because there is no sweeter way on earth to celebrate the natural resurrection of life in early spring.

Maple producers have harvested the first of all crops with the ingathering of hundreds of thousands of sap after its pearl-shaped droplets have rolled out over the dainty spillway called a spile. The spile is inserted into the side of a maple tree where a maple producer has drilled a tiny hole for the sugar water to escape. In other words, they have "tapped" the tree.

Collectively, the droplets ultimately fill multiplied tanks that hold the sweet water for boiling down or evaporating it into an

all natural 100 percent pure maple syrup.

Like honey, maple syrup is one of nature's best sweeteners.

A maple queen always reigns over the festivities on the last two weekends in April. This year Jessica Brown a senior from Somerset Area High School won the prestigious honor in an educational scholarship pageant held earlier.

Being highly visible and promoting the maple industry to the public is her primary responsibility.

The maple king title, however, is determined by a contest wherein this season's maple products are judged by knowledgeable persons.

Matthew Emerick, 17, of Hyndman, the representative of Emerick's Sugar Camp, was chosen.

"I put our best products in

the nine classes needed to win," Emerick said, "and won."

The Emerick products took seven first, three second, one third, and one fifth place awards.

Emerick, who always has a birthday during the maple festival, was the maple king once before, two years ago.

He loves maple sugaring, at age 17, as much as he did when his parents, Ed and Wilma Emerick allowed him to help in little ways at age six or seven.

More often, than not, it's the younger man boiling down the sap, while his dad hauls sweet water into the camp from the woods.

They use a reverse osmosis machine to separate the water prior to the evaporation itself, so only that part containing the sugar continues through the entire process.

Emerick gets creative with maple syrup and came up with maple-covered pretzels for the 50th Maple Festival. This time however, like William Tell he chose to target an apple with a bit of genius and made a "Maple Candy Apple."

I cooked the syrup to 300 degrees and dipped the apple in it for a hard maple coating."

The juicy Macintosh may rise to new heights of popularity if others like it.

"It's interesting to see what I can come up with and create each year," said the Meyersdale high school junior.

Plans for his future are unsettled, Emerick reports, but adds without hesitation, that maple sugaring will always be a part of his life.

As Maple King, promotion is his goal, although, occasionally, he escorts the Maple Queen. Next spring, Emerick will perform the official tree-tapping ceremony for the Somerset County Maple Producer's Association.

The organization, according to its president Gary Blocher of Milroy Farms Maple Camp near Salisbury, has about 35 members. Blocher says there are at least that many additional backyard maple producers who enjoy



Matthew Emerick, the 1999 maple king is pictured in the Sugar Shack at the 52nd Annual Maple Festival in Meyersdale. The exhibit shows the proper way to tap a maple tree.



Jason VanGilder of the Berlin-Brothersvalley FFA is in the Sugar Shack at the 1999 maple festival in Meyersdale, making sugar in the cucumber wood trough.



Jessica Brown, maple queen for the 52nd Pennsylvania Maple Festival, and several members of her court are eating spotza. From left, princess Erin Francis, Queen Jessica, Heather Frantz, maid of honor; princess Breiann Howsare, and Olivia Wright, maid of honor and first runner-up.

making maple syrup for their families.

On-average the 1999 season was hit by sporadic weather patterns that across the county affected the overall maple production. February had unseasonably warm temperatures, the snowstorms in early March, when good runs of sugar water were expected, instead shut down some camps.

The Maple Festival includes an historical pageant titled "Legend of the Magic Water," auto shows, grand feature parade, Lions pancake house, maple sugar demonstrations, historic Maple Manor, old Doctor's Office, Cobbler's Shop, Country Store and live entertainment.

There are competitions in running, walking and biking.

Edible Flowers Offer Gourmet Flavor Bouquet

UNIVERSITY PARK (Centre Co.) — Food fans are continually on the lookout for new recipe for ingredients, and a horticulture expert in Penn State's College of Agricultural Sciences says studious gourmets can find many palatable items in their flower garden.

"First, you should eat only those flowers you can absolutely identify as edible," said Peter Ferretti, professor of vegetable crops. "Second, you should eat only flowers grown in a garden where no pesticides have been used. That means do not eat flowers from nurseries, florists or garden centers—most flowers from those places have received chemical treatments."

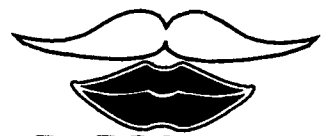
Ferretti cites "Edible Flowers from Garden to Plate," by Cathy Barash, as a must-have guide to flowers as food. The book lists 70 types of edible flowers and offers detailed photographs and descriptions.

Ferretti says most edible flowers are used as garnishes, decorations or in salads. In most

cases, he recommends eating only flower petals, removing the pistils, stigmas, and stamens from the bloom before eating. "An exception to that is saffron, the world's most expensive spice, which is made from the pistils of the fall-blooming saffron crocus (*C. sativas*)," he said.

He also recommends that people who suffer from allergies, hay fever or asthma refrain from eating flowers. "Flower petals can contain a great deal of pollen and other allergens," Ferretti says.

Many edible flowers grow wild in fields and along roadsides. Ferretti warns that flowers should not be picked near a busy highway, road or street. "The lead from car exhausts and cadmium released by the friction of tires on a roadway will permeate all plant life near a roadway," he says. "I would pick edible flowers only from a road that is rarely traveled, and even then I would pick flowers well away from the road — about 6 to 10 feet."



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