



# WYOMING MAPLE SYRUP NO, THAT WAS NO TYPO!

## Your local syrup source is masquerading as a boxelder tree

By Brian Sebade

Few people have had the chance to taste maple syrup produced here in the dry, wind-blown Cowboy State.

Those who have tasted Wyoming maple syrup know there is a hidden treasure in many wooded draws and yards across the state. You may think there is no way Wyoming could produce fresh maple syrup like New

England and the upper Midwest; however, Wyoming IS capable of producing a delectable syrup. You'll receive many curious looks if you attempt it, but the rewards are sweet.

### Getting Started

The Manitoba maple (*Acer negundo* L.) is native to Wyoming. Most of us know this tree as a boxelder.

This Wyoming-tough tree is often undervalued. The female tree is mainly known as a host to boxelder bugs each summer and provides children with seeds that flutter in the air like helicopter blades. As a member of the maple family, the tree produces a clear, odorless sap every spring just like its cousin the sugar maple.





*Hammer the tap 1 to 2 inches into the tree.*



*Water jugs can serve as collection containers.*

Locating and identifying trees is done most easily in the summer and not in the winter months when syrup making occurs. The USDA plant identification website is a helpful resource. You'll need permission from landowners to search for and tap any trees not on your property. The best trees for tapping are healthy ones 8 inches in diameter 5 feet from the ground.

### **When to Tap**

Next, figure out how many trees you'll need and when to tap them. This is the trickiest part of the process. There is no exact science to choosing the date or the amount of sap that will be produced per tree. There is a limited time during late winter/early spring during which trees begin to move the stored sugars, water, and carbohydrates – sap – in their roots to their stems. This critical two-to three-week period occurs when daytime temperatures get several degrees above freezing but nighttime still reaches freezing. If the ground is frozen, you are most likely in the correct time frame, but if there is green grass, you are likely too late. The amount of sap also varies depending upon the health and water resources of the tree. Some trees will produce several gallons while others may produce less than a pint.

### **Collecting Sap**

Taps and collection mechanisms come in many different shapes and sizes. Water jugs can also be used as collection buckets. No matter the method, make sure you do not put too many taps into a tree. Too many taps will stress and may eventually kill the tree. Using one tap per tree is a good place to start. To place a



*The boiling process may take an entire afternoon.*



*The right syrup consistency is reached when the temperature is 7.5 degrees above water boiling temperature.*



*Syrup can be canned or bottled.*

tap in a tree, drill a hole at a slight upward angle 1 to 2 inches into the tree. Make sure to use the recommended wood drill bit for the particular tap you buy and that you don't cause more damage than necessary to the tree. Gently tap the tap into the tree making sure to not split or crack the wood around the hole. Collect sap often to prevent overflow. During peak flow, trees can produce a gallon of sap a day.

Sap ranges in sugar content from 2-10 percent when harvested. You are looking for a finished product that is around 66-67 percent sugar. This means you will need gallons of sap to make enough syrup for more than one meal. A large container, like a cooler, that can be kept in a cold area

is recommended for storing sap over several weeks until you are ready to boil it. Remove the tap after sap stops flowing using a claw hammer or small pry tool. These steps can be repeated on the same tree using a new hole each year providing the tree is in good condition each year. The tree will heal on its own.

### **Making Syrup**

Processing is the next step. Filter the sap to remove any impurities before boiling. Cheesecloth, a new, clean sock, or a felt filter all work well. Place the filtered sap into a large pot. You may need more than one depending upon how much sap is collected. Once boiling, the sap will take a long time (an entire afternoon) to boil and reduce. While boiling,

occasionally clean off the excess bubbles in the boiling pot.

To reach syrup consistency, the liquid must reach 7.5 degrees Fahrenheit above the boiling point. Make sure to determine the boiling point (temperature of water) at your altitude before you begin. The sap will slowly darken as it is reduced into syrup. The sap will have a sugar content of around 66-67 percent once the syrup has reached the desired temperature. You can filter one more time or just let it cool. The sap can be canned or bottled for future use.

Enjoy!

Here are helpful resources:

- [www.cornellmaple.com](http://www.cornellmaple.com)
- [www.mapletrader.com](http://www.mapletrader.com)

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