

## Grades of Pure Maple Syrup

The State of Michigan has adopted the USDA standards for maple syrup. Pure maple syrup is graded by color. There are three grades, or color standards, designated within the **USDA Grade A Standards**:

Light Amber (LA)

Medium Amber (MA)

Dark Amber (DA)

In general, the lightest syrups are lighter in flavor and have a much more delicate maple taste. While generally considered the premium syrup, light amber is usually quite subtle in taste and generally not preferred by the buying public. As the grade darkens, the flavor generally gets stronger or more pronounced. Many people prefer a medium or dark amber syrup for table use.

Syrup that is darker in color than any of the three Grade A standards is classified as **USDA Grade B**. While Grade A syrups are considered "table syrups," Grade B is designated as a "cooking syrup." It has a very robust flavor, not so easily lost when combined with other ingredients. It is generally cheaper to purchase, because it is considered a "lower" grade, though a higher demand in recent years has pushed pricing for Grade B syrup up to equal or close to the lighter syrups. Most people prefer Grade B for cooking and many consumers have developed a taste for Grade B maple syrup for table use, particularly those who cook with whole grains that can mask the flavor of the more delicate grades.

There are no differences in sugar content, density, minerals or chemical makeup of Grade A vs. Grade B syrups. It is really a color designation. And while the flavor rule of stronger taste as the syrup darkens is generally true, they don't ALWAYS go hand in hand. You may find delicious Grade B syrup and Grade A Light Amber syrup that lacks a maple flavor. It really boils down to specific use and personal preference and the particular batch produced.