

Maple Production 101:

Quick Answers to our most Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

Is it going to be a good season?

We'll tell you in April! Our formal prediction day is April 15th. We'll be experts by then!

When should I tap?

O.K. This might not be as quick and easy as we thought . . . if we were better predictors, we'd probably be in a more lucrative business! There's no good answer to this. The trade-off for every sugarmaker is to get the early sap but not tap so early that your holes dry up by the time typical weather comes around. Sugarmakers generally fall in one of two camps: those who try to get the earliest sap they can and those who hold off for the typical maple season. Ultimately, you have to follow your own instinct!

How far should I drill into the tree?

Drill your taphole 1 ½" to 2 " deep. Keep your taphole flat or slightly uphill so the sap can drain out of your hole. Also, drill carefully to keep a round hole that is crisp—not raggedy—to get a good seal around your spile.

Should I use 7/16" or 5/16" spiles?

Our industry has been using 7/16" spiles for many decades, with no long-lasting damage to the trees. But we now know that healing time is quicker and scarring tissue reduced with the new smaller spiles. They are just "good for the trees!"

How do I know when my syrup is done?

If you want to make it like our ancestors, pay close attention to how the syrup acts and how bubbles form and you'll make excellent syrup. But you'll get more consistency and accuracy with a thermometer and hydrometer. Most sugarmakers use a thermometer to monitor how the boiling is going. We recommend a hydrometer or refractometer for the final testing for the most accurate measure of standard syrup density.

How do I use a syrup Hydrometer?

*Take your syrup right from your boiling pan and put a sample in a test cup at least 8" deep. Carefully lower the hydrometer into the hot syrup. The hydrometer should float so that the top **Hot Test** red line is even with the surface of the liquid. Simple as that! If the red line lies above the syrup surface, your sample is too heavy and you'll need to thin it down a bit and re-test. If your red line is buried, the syrup is too thin and further boiling is required. Remember, hydrometers are fragile, glass instruments. They must be handled very carefully. We recommend that you keep a spare on hand in case of breakage.*

How do I clean my pan?

During the boiling process, the minerals in the sap will "calcify" and create what's known as "sugar sand" or nitre. We carry Sap Pan Cleaner to break down the hard minerals. One gallon of cleaner mixes with water to make 40 gallons of cleaner. We recommend using it only on your syrup pan. Because the cleaner has an acid base, it is important to carefully follow the directions on the bottle to ensure the longest life for your equipment.

How do I get my syrup to go through the filters?

Filtering may well be the most difficult part of sugaring. Everyone has been frustrated with the process at one time or another! The trick to filtering is keeping your syrup HOT! It doesn't hurt to have a good dose of patience! Filter directly off your finishing boil and make sure your filters are down inside a covered container. You need to keep the your syrup hot as long as you can as it goes through the slow filtering process. For the clearest syrup, resist helping your syrup along, but let the filters do the work. And did we say, "Have patience?"

How do I get my containers to seal?

To properly can and seal your syrup, start with a clean container and pour in your hot syrup. The magic canning temperature range is 180 to 200 degrees—at least 180 to sterilize your container and no more than 200 to avoid making more sugar sand. Fill the container to the top and put the cover on tightly. The bottle will seal as it cools. Some producers like to set the bottle on its side, or even up-side down, to let the hot syrup touch all the surfaces of the neck and cover. We invert the hot bottles up-side down back into their cases and let them cool.

