

Hello Folks,

Our favorite time of year is quickly approaching-the Holiday Season. We thought this year, in addition to sending you a folder of our fine Vermont Maple Products, we'd also write you a little "history" of Maple to let you know the richness or the tradition of Maple and why people react with such great pleasure and enthusiasm when they receive gifts of our products.

Accer Saccharum is the technical name for the hard rock maple which produces most of the sap that is evaporated into maple syrup and sugar. Since the Indians first discovered its extraordinary secret, it has provided sweetness and nourishment for hundreds of years. The "Rock Maple" flourishes in Vermont because of its rich, fertile soil, cold, humid climate and mountainous terrain.

There is an interesting Indian legend which states that once maple trees gave forth almost pure syrup, but when the god, NE-naw-Bo-zhoo, tasted it, he decided it was too good and easy to gather. Thinking it would not be highly valued, he diluted the sap until the sweetness was hardly noticeable. "Now," he said "my nephews will have to labor hard to make sugar from this sap and they will appreciate it much more." (Take it from us, we sure do work hard to get the sap, make the syrup and we *do* prize it highly:)

An Iroquois legend indicates to us how the first Maple Syrup was "evaporated." On his way out hunting on an early March day, Chief Woksis, pulled his tomahawk from the tree that he'd thrown it into the night before and left for the day's hunt. The weather warmed, and as fate would have it, a clay vessel was sitting at the base of the tree. The tree was a maple and sap dripped into the vessel all day. When it came time to prepare the evening meal, Woksis' squaw noticed the "water" in the pot. She tasted it, found it good, and used it for cooking water. After boiling awhile, the unmistakable maple aroma burst forth. As Woksis returned home, he knew from quite a distance that something special was cooking tonight. In fact, the "water" had turned to syrup and had flavored their dinner with maple.

At this early stage in the art of Syrup Making, the Indians had not yet discovered metal pots. Therefore, using clay vessel, hollowed-out wood or birch bark pieces sewn together, the Indians gathered the sap and then boiled it by dropping red hot stones into vat. New, hot stones were continually added as the others cooled, until the water was evaporated and what was left was a thick syrup. To speed up the "evaporation" process the Indians soon learned that if they left the gathered sap out to freeze at night, they could throw off the icy crust in the morning and the remaining sap was much sweeter and consequently took less time and energy to become maple syrup.

In contrast to today's metal buckets and plastic tubing, the Indians used birch bark for their carrying troughs and buckets. These were usually "glued" together with pine resin.

Our forefathers in rural New England learned very quickly the hardships and inhospitality of the long, cold winter season. Stories abound of the early settlers' lack of food because of poor crops and being "snowed in." The settlers here, however, were greatly indebted to the Indians who showed them the "secrets" of the Maple Tree and survive the severity of the Vermont Winter. In many cases maple was the primary family food until the snow melted and food could be brought in from the closest settlement.

Gradually the settlers began improving some of the Indian's primitive and wasteful ways of making syrup. They first substituted iron or copper kettles for the wood or birch bark of the Indians. This enabled the sap to be heated directly over fire without the use of stones. Also augers were used to drill holes in the trees into which were inserted wooden spiles-this replaced the old method of "gashing" the trees and inflicting serious injury to the trees. Later, large wooden buckets were developed and hung under the spiles to catch the sap dripping from the trees. It wasn't until sometime in the last 1800's that some folks turned to using tin buckets.

Both maple syrup and maple sugar are unrefined natural sweets-sucrose just as found in cane and beet sugar. They therefore contain the proportion of calcium, phosphorous and other minerals needed for tree-growth and equally as important to our diet.

On our kitchen table maple syrup can be used as a substitute for regular sugars and syrups. This is the quality which made it so essential to the Indians and the early settlers, when other sugars were unavailable. Actually, the Indians never used salt. Instead they used sugar not only as a condiment but as a preservative and as a flavoring for almost all of their foods. The primary form of their sugar was in a granular or grainy type of hard sugar made by reheating the maple syrup constantly stirring for a long time until it crystallized. The same sweetness the Indians and settlers enjoyed is what makes syrup so versatile and has endeared it with generations of Americans.

Maple syrup is the first finished product that comes from the evaporated sap and probably is the most widely used maple product. Hope you enjoyed reading this history of Maple Syrup.

Phyllis W. Kuhn