

## **Maple Update 2011**

This is a favorite time of year, pre-maple season. The weather is nasty, lots of snow, below zero temperatures, ice, and wind. For most folks, this season goes on for another 2 months, and no one leaves the house until after Easter. If you get yourself used to the cold, though, it is a great time of year. Now I am outside setting up for maple syrup production. When the season actually starts, in mid February, the weather has changed to not be so extreme, and the days are considerably longer. It is really a beautiful time of year, and the promise of Spring is always in the air.

One of the byproducts of gathering sap, and cooking down maple syrup, is the mid winter exercise it gives you. Even now, in the middle of January, I am splitting wood, and getting my equipment together. When the season starts, I am trudging around the woods with full buckets collecting sap. It forces me to go out in the cold, and face the weather. In the roughest of weather, if you are doing something outside, it is healthy and entertaining.

Every year I learn a little more about the process of making maple syrup, and every year is an adventure. Some years the sap runs for 5 weeks. Last year the sap only ran for one week. I thought I'd made mistakes in tapping, or timing, but all the big maple guys around had similar results. In the Mid Hudson area, the season pretty much runs from the end of February to the end of March. I look forward to start maple work around George Washington's birthday, and by St. Patrick's day I am ready to have a big outdoor cook out to finish off the season.

I am asked questions each year about maple syrup production. Here are some basics: Maple syrup is made by collecting maple sap, and reducing it by boiling away the water, leaving maple sugar in a certain concentration, 66.5%. You need 40-50 gallons of sap for every finished gallon of maple syrup. There is nothing else added, it is maple sap and only maple sap that is the first and last ingredient. Maple comes out of all maples, but sugar maples have the highest concentration of sugar, and only require 40 gallons of sap per finished gallon.

The sap just drips out of a cut in the tree, on days when the nighttime is frozen, and the daytime is above freezing. At the right time of year, and weather, in the heat of maple season, some trees will produce 5 gallons of sap each day. The first year I cooked maple, I tapped 12 trees, and got about a gallon of syrup, using my Weber Grill, and some old wood I had around to burn. This year I am going to tap about 100 trees. I have all the right buckets, taps, and lines, and I have about 3 cords of wood split and ready. If the weather is right, this might be a good year for me. I am a small backyard producer, as the big guys are tapping over 1,000 trees. But maybe I'll be lucky and get a lot of syrup out of it.

I have two evaporators, large vats with a firebox below, to boil off the water from the sap, and concentrate it to make syrup. This has to be done outside, as the resulting steam makes giant clouds. I suppose you could cook off a couple 20 gallons in a tilt kettle, in a commercial kitchen, with the exhaust fans on. It would be inefficient, but you could get a fine gallon of syrup in this manner.

Last year I started a new project. I took a bucket of sap, and gave it to 4 different Chefs in my area, and asked them to work with it. One guy used it for some pickling, one used it to make brine for fresh pork, and one cooked it down and poached pears. I cooked it down by about half, so it was about 12% sugar, and used it as the basis for a court bouillon, in other words I added some salt, celery, onion, bay leaf and lemon, and used it to poach salmon. I finished the salmon with a very light soy sauce glaze. It came out pretty good. We'll all be working on this project again this year.

## ***Ice Cream Puffs with Maple Caramel Sauce***

Makes 12 portions

|                      |        |                   |         |
|----------------------|--------|-------------------|---------|
| Water                | 1 cup  | Butter            | 3 oz    |
| Eggs                 | 4 each | Flour a/p         | 6 oz    |
| Coffee Ice Cream     | 18 oz  | Vanilla Ice Cream | 18 oz   |
| Strawberry Ice Cream | 18 oz  | Pure Maple Syrup  | 8 oz    |
| Heavy Cream          | 24 oz  | Mint Leaves fresh | garnish |

### ***For the Puffs (Pate a Choux)***

Boil water and butter, add flour and stir until well blended. Put into a small mixer, and add the eggs slowly while beating, to form an emulsion. Scrape the sides carefully before finishing with the mixer. Pipe onto parchment paper, with #6 plain round tip, holding the bag straight up and down, to form nickel sized balls, well separated from each other.

Put in a 400 degree oven, and turn down oven to 325. Bake until done, about 15 minutes. Allow to cool on pan. Store in a dry place, or freeze, do not refrigerate the puffs

### ***Maple Caramel Sauce***

Use darker Maple syrup if available. In a tall heavy pan, cook the maple syrup slowly until it starts to get very thick, and dark. Be very careful as this will bubble over if not stirred constantly, and will really burn you if you let it touch your skin or clothes. Allow to cool only a little, and then stir in the heavy cream, whipping constantly. Cool, and cover.

### ***Assemble the dessert***

Cut three puffs in half horizontally. Place a #20 (1.5 oz) scoop of each ice cream on each bottom half. Cover with the top half.

Decorate with the maple caramel sauce. Garnish with a fanned strawberry, or mint leaf. This should be served immediately, so the pastry will still be crisp before the ice cream melts.

**Maple Black Pepper Pork Chops with winter root vegetable medley**

makes 12 servings

|                           |         |                    |         |
|---------------------------|---------|--------------------|---------|
| Pork Chops, bone in, 6 oz | 24 each | Olive Oil          | 2 oz    |
| Whole Black Peppercorns   | 2 oz    | Salt               | 1 pinch |
| Shallots, minced          | 4 oz    | Thyme, fresh       | 1 sprig |
| Good Cider Vinegar        | 8 oz    | Pure Maple Syrup   | 12 oz   |
| Carrots, sliced           | 1 pound | Parsnips, julienne | 1 pound |
| Turnips, sliced           | 1 pound | Onions, large dice | ½ pound |

Crack the black pepper on a cutting board with a heavy sauce pan. Coat the pork chops lightly with this cracked pepper, and a very little salt. Allow to sit for a few minutes.

Brown the chops in a heavy pan, until they are well seared all over. Place the pan in a medium oven until they are just about done. Set the chops aside on a separate pan.

Sweat the shallots in the original pan until they are soft. Add the thyme and heat well. Deglaze the pan with the vinegar, under low heat, to help dislodge all the good bits from the original sear. Reduce slightly, and then add the Pure Maple Syrup. Bring to a boil and cook slowly for an additional 5 minutes or so, until the sauce is of a lightly thickened consistency.

Replace the pork chops in the sauce, and reheat for service. There should be enough sauce for the chops, and to pool under the root vegetables on the plate.

Cut the root vegetables into several different shapes, such as round carrot slices, julienne parsnips, cubed red potatoes, and triangle shaped turnip slices. Sweat some large diced onion in a pan until they start to sweeten, and toss in the other vegetables. Bake uncovered, stirring often, until they are just about done and have started to brown well. Cool, and reheat servings individually for service.

**Maple Glazed Pork Roast with braised Endive and Roast Fingerling Potatoes**

makes 12 portions

|                        |         |                              |          |
|------------------------|---------|------------------------------|----------|
| Dijon Mustard, grained | 4 oz    | Pure Maple Syrup             | 8 oz     |
| Garlic Cloves, sliced  | 2 oz    | Pork Loin boneless, about 9# | 1 each   |
| Belgian Endive         | 6 each  | Fingerling Potatoes          | 3 pounds |
| Demi Glaze             | 24 oz   | Fresh Thyme                  | 1 sprig  |
| Fresh Rosemary         | 1 sprig | Butter                       | 2 oz     |

Combine mustard, oil, garlic, salt, pepper and maple syrup in bowl. Whisk to combine.

Trim the pork loin, and tie to keep shape. Place in a large bag, or bowl, and coat well with the maple and mustard marinade. Cover, and put in cooler overnight, at least 8 hours

Remove the pork loin from the marinade, and reserve the marinade for use later. Brown the pork loin on a chargrill, or on a fire. When browned all over, place on a rack, and roast uncovered at 325 degrees until the temperature is 160 degrees. Baste with the juices in the pan. Remove to a platter when done.

Pour the remaining marinade into the roasting pan, and scrape the juices from the bottom of the pan. Add the demi glaze, and bring to a boil, and strain into a sauce pan with. Correct the seasonings.

Place the halved endives, and the whole fingerlings on a roasting pan, with some seasoned water, some butter, and a little chopped fresh herbs on the potatoes. Cover with foil, and roast for about 10 minutes, and then finish roasting, uncovered, until the browned and soft.

Slice the pork loin, and serve two pieces over some sauce, with Endive and Potatoes to garnish.

***Lemon Maple Salmon served with wild rice and broccoli rabe***

makes 12 portions

|                              |         |                  |       |
|------------------------------|---------|------------------|-------|
| Lemons                       | 6 ea    | Pure Maple Syrup | 8 oz  |
| Good Cider Vinegar           | 4 oz    | Soy Sauce        | 2 oz  |
| Salmon filets, boneless 8 oz | 12 ea   | 100% Wild Rice   | 18 oz |
| Fresh Broccoli Rabe          | 3 pound | Olive oil        | 2 oz  |
| Garlic, peeled               | 2 oz    |                  |       |

Squeeze the juice from the lemons into a saucepan, and slice the juiced lemons as thin as you can. Add the maple syrup, soy sauce, and vinegar to the lemon juice, bring to a boil and reduce by half.

When ready to fire the order, place the salmon filet on a sizzle platter, with a little water underneath. Cover the fish with sliced, juiced lemons, and pour on some of the maple sauce. Bake in a hot oven until the fish is done. You may need to add a little water to the pan, or some marinade to keep the fish moist. You could lightly dust the sliced lemons with some breadcrumbs if you wish.

Prepare the Wild Rice as usual, in salted water for 50-60 minutes. Cool, and reheat for each order. Blanch the Broccoli Rabe in water, and cool. Brown some garlic in a sauté pan, and toss in the Broccoli Rabe, just enough for a few orders.

Serve the Salmon on a plate with the wild rice on one side, and the Broccoli Rabe on the other.