



# It's Maple Time

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It is late January as I write this. But Spring for me comes sooner than for some people. Like most maple guys, I am busy getting ready for the tapping season. Maple syrup is simply the reduced sap of a maple tree. A

hole is cut in the side of the tree, the sap drips out, and is collected. It is then cooked over a very hot fire, evaporating water from the sap, until it is reduced by 40 times its volume, more or less. Nothing is added but the sap from a tree.

Maple sap is a remarkable product. Right from the tree it looks and tastes like really really good water. The collection process is easy, but a lot of work. I use aluminum taps, which are available at the local hardware store. To these I connect a flexible plastic hose, running into 5 gallon plastic buckets, which I collect from various restaurants. Then once or twice a week I get my fires going and boil away. The season can be any time during February or March, depending on the year and the weather.

The big boys, the commercial producers, collect their sap with an elaborate system of hoses, pumps, and collection stations. You may notice trees in certain areas all tied together by blue lines. This is a major syrup producer, collecting sap.

The evaporation process is also quite simple. Just get a real hot fire going, outside, and boil down the sap. Your evaporator can be anything from a flat pan on a grill, up to the great commercial evaporators that the professionals use.

Maple syrup has to be cooked to an exact degree

of sugar content, 66.5%. This can be roughly measured by temperature. For that it would be about 7 degrees over the boiling point of water. But it is much more precisely measured with a hydrometer, which measures the Brix content of the liquid, or amount of sugar left after boiling. The syrup is then bottled. Simple and delicious.

That's the agricultural side. Here's a bit of the culinary side. Maple syrup is sort of hard to use effectively in most recipes. The taste is actually sort of subtle; when you consider that it is diluted in the other ingredients. It does have to be concentrated in some way to have a serious effect. There are two good ways to concentrate maple flavor in a dish. One is to reduce the syrup itself. This is a potentially messy procedure, as it'll boil over if you look at it wrong. The result is a very intense, hot syrup that must be used immediately, or it'll harden up like brittle candy. This is very flavorful if used right.

The second is to use the syrup as a rub, or marinade. If the syrup is on a product, say pork loin, long enough, or the cooking process is slow enough, the maple flavor is intensified to the point where it will be able to compete with other strong flavors. Just putting syrup in a sauce is nice, but by intensifying the flavor, it can be matched with other flavors to create a third, most delicious taste. Accompanying flavors which work well include cracked black pepper, chilies, almond, orange, lemon, and other fruit concentrates.

*John Griffin*

Here are but a few examples of maple as an ingredient:

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## MAPLE CRÈME BRULEE

Heavy Cream 1 qt  
Egg Yolks 4 each  
Pure Vanilla Extract 1 tsp  
Salt pinch  
Maple Syrup 1 pint

In a mixing bowl, beat the egg yolks, sugar, vanilla, and salt. Boil the heavy cream, and slowly pour into the egg yolk mixture, whipping at the same time. At the same time, boil the maple syrup in a large pot, until it is reduced to ¼ of its original volume. Be careful as this will boil over, and is super heated. Cool only slightly, and pour in a stream into the (warmed) cream mixture, whipping at the same time.

Strain into small, shallow oven proof dishes, or ramekins, from 2 to 5 ounces in size. Bake on a pan with one inch of water, at 300°F, for about one hour, until the pudding has firmed up when gently shaken.

Remove from the water bath, and place in refrigerator until cool. Cover with plastic wrap if you are going to keep them overnight, or up to 3 days. When ready to serve, sprinkle with granulated sugar, and allow to set for a few minutes. Place under a very hot broiler, while watching, so that they do not burn. Remove when they are golden brown on the top, and serve. Or, you can better use a small torches sold in kitchen supply shops made for this purpose.

Clean the tenderloins briefly, and lay out in a hotel pan. Season lightly, and cover with maple syrup. Allow to sit in the cooler, covered, for at least a few hours. Overnight would be better.

Take out the tenderloins, and place on a rack, so that they will dry somewhat. Reserve the syrup which remains in the hotel pan. Place in the cooler like this for at least one hour. At this point use any dry rub which you prefer, and give them a light coat, less than you think. Cover and allow to sit for at least one hour.

Sear the tenderloins in a heavy pan, and remove to an oven pan, with rack, to finish. Cool the first pan somewhat when the tenderloins have been removed, and add the chopped shallots. When they've started to cook, crack the peppercorns, and add to the shallots. Bring to heat, and add the reserved (used) maple syrup. Bring to a boil, and add the brown sauce. Bring to a boil, and allow to cook. Strain, and adjust the thickness. The seasonings should need no adjustment, what with the peppercorns, and the salt in the rub.

Serve the (sliced) hot tenderloin over rice, or pasta, and glaze with the sauce.

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## PAN SEARED PORK TENDERLOIN WITH MAPLE PEPPERCORN SAUCE

About 25 portions

Pork Tenderloins 1 case (16 pieces)  
Maple Syrup 1 pint  
Dry rub of your choice - Pretty much equal parts of each  
ex. Celery Salt  
Cumin  
Chili Powder  
Dry Mustard  
Brown Sugar  
Paprika  
Garlic Powder  
Good Brown Sauce One half gallon not very thick  
Shallots, chopped 6 each  
Whole Black Peppercorns one small spoonful

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## MAPLE SMOKED DUCK

This is the best duck recipe in the world. Clean and dry a duck, including the neck and guts. Coat well with maple syrup, replace the neck and guts into the duck, and allow to sit, covered, in the cooler for at least a few hours. Remove from the cooler, and set on a rack to dry somewhat. Rub very lightly with a good rub, maybe with more heat than you'd think. Allow to sit uncovered for at least an hour in the cooler.

Get a good charcoal heat going, and sprinkle with soaked apple or cherry wood chips. When the smoke has developed, place the duck on a cooking rack, and smoke at 200-225°F for 4-6 hours. Be careful of the temperature, and add enough wood chips to keep up a good smoke.

When it's done, it may be eaten right away, or it is even better as a cold dish. Maple smoked duck make great salad, it can be reheated in a hot oven to crisp the skin, or used, sparingly, as an ingredient in soups, particularly lentil soup. This is not an acquired taste, most everyone will love this.