

## Late start to maple syrup season

Life isn't as sweet as some maple farmers would like these days. The recent cold temperatures are preventing the sap from flowing out of maple trees, putting a damper on syrup production season.

Ontario's maple syrup season usually runs from February through April, with warm days and cold nights providing the ideal condition for collecting sap. The lack of warmer daytime temperatures is not allowing sap to travel up the tree to be collected. Ideal conditions for sap to flow fluctuate between -4 degrees at night and 5 degrees during the day.

Now for those of you with a sweet tooth, there is no need to worry, there is still plenty of time in the season for things to bounce back. As the world's fourth largest producer of maple syrup, Ontarians have long know about this delight first introduced by North American natives when European settlers first arrived.

Early settlers learned the process of boiling sap and have since improved the methods, however, the process remains unchanged since those early days. It takes 30-40 gallons of sap to boil down to one gallon of maple syrup and typically a sugar maple tree has to be about 35 years old before it becomes productive. In a good year the sap from one tap will produce one litre of syrup. Sap directly from a tree is not very sweet and by condensing it, it becomes the sweet nectar we know it to be.

With over 500 producers belonging to the Ontario Maple Syrup Producers Association, lovers of maple products have a lot of choice when it come to choosing a maple delight. Whether you purchase maple syrup from a road side producer, a country store or a supermarket, be sure to look for the Ontario Maple Seal of Quality for a syrup that has been made by a conscientious producer using best practices.

Once opened, containers of syrup should be refrigerated, while tightly sealed containers of syrup can be frozen for up to one year. However, the best way to experience maple products is to visit a local sugar shack, where many local producers have visitors taste freshly made syrup drizzled on snow. A day at a sugar shack is both educational and delicious!

**By Michelle Austen**