One hundred percent maple syrup is made by boiling and concentrating the sap from maple trees. Maple sap, as it comes from the tree, is a clear liquid with a slightly sweet taste. The characteristic color and maple flavor is developed during processing. It takes approximately 40 gallons of maple sap to make one gallon of finished maple syrup.

Selection

Maple syrup should never be confused with blended pancake syrups or toppings. These toppings are usually corn syrup or cane sugar based and are flavored with 1 to 3 percent maple syrup. Read the label carefully to make sure you are purchasing what you want. The label should read MAPLE SYRUP.

Maple syrup is packaged in tin, plastic, or glass. Each has advantages and disadvantages as to maintaining the quality of the syrup in storage.

- **Glass** maintains the flavor of the maple syrup indefinitely. It may darken slightly, especially if the syrup is not kept in the dark. Glass also allows you to inspect the syrup for cloudiness or sugar crystals. Glass containers are usually reserved for packaging small amounts—½ pint, pint, and quarts. It is a costly way to package and is often seen in gift packs.
- **Tin** maintains syrup quality for 11 to 12 months. Tin cans rust, so care must be taken as to where the container is stored. A tin flavor can be picked up if stored for long periods.
- **Plastic** is a popular packaging material. It is lightweight and easy to use. Syrup stored in plastic will usually maintain quality for three to six months. Plastic breathes, so a color and flavor change can be the result in long-term storage in plastic containers. However, new plastic containers have been developed to extend shelf life. The disadvantage to these, so far, is that the cost is more than the regular plastic jugs.

The label on every container of maple syrup should specify the name of the producer, the volume of the syrup in the container, and whether the syrup is a blend or pure maple syrup.

Maple syrup is packaged in a variety of sizes. Select the size container that best fits your needs.

- Smaller containers—½ pint, pint, and quarts—are often purchased by first-time maple buyers, as gifts, or for the single person who enjoys an occasional maple treat.
- Larger containers—½ gallon and gallon—are for larger gifts or for the family sold on the pure maple flavor and high quality of the product. People who purchase maple syrup in larger containers often have a favorite “producer” or roadside market from whom they annually purchase.

The important thing to remember when selecting the container is to purchase the size that can be conveniently used within a year. Quality problems can develop after that time, especially if the syrup is not stored under suitable conditions. Plus, it is fun to
purchase new syrup each year, visit with your favorite producer, and discuss the year’s “crop”!

The maple syrup you purchase may be voluntarily graded. Most producers or retailers will use the U.S. Department of Agriculture grades for table syrup. They are Grade A Light Amber, Grade A Medium Amber, and Grade A Dark Amber. Color is the principal grade-determining factor for syrup that meets the other requirements of density, lack of “off flavor” or cloudiness. When these factors are met, there is no difference in “quality” between grades of table syrup. There are definite flavor differences for each grade, but try all three grades to see which one you like best. All are good and are enjoyed by consumers based on personal preference.

- **GRADE A LIGHT AMBER** is a light golden syrup, with a delicate flavor and smooth texture. The USDA describes it as having a “smoky” taste.

- **GRADE A MEDIUM AMBER** has the characteristic “maple” flavor. Consumers describe it as “a medium-bodied golden syrup with a lingering maple flavor.”

- **GRADE A DARK AMBER** is a robust maple syrup. As the name implies, it is the darkest of the grades.

**Storage**

The three main enemies of maple syrup are air, time, and temperature. Therefore, the following storage practices are recommended:

- Immediately store your maple syrup after purchase in the refrigerator even if the container has not been opened. If this is not possible, consider freezing the syrup.*

- Maple syrup packaged in tin or glass can be stored for up to one year in the refrigerator in its original container. However, some people who buy in large quantities often repackage and freeze the syrup and take it out of the freezer when needed.*

- Because plastic “breathes,” repackage syrup originally packed in plastic if you plan to store it for more than three months.*

- If excess water is present or if containers are not clean when filled, bacteria, yeast, or mold may grow during storage. Do not simply remove the mold and reheat the product. Some microorganisms produce toxins as they grow, and these toxins could make you sick. The product should be discarded.

**Nutrition**

One tablespoon of maple syrup has about 50 calories. Maple syrup is 67% sugar and 33% water. The sugar in maple syrup is sucrose with small amounts of glucose and fructose sugar. White sugar is sucrose. There is no direct scientific evidence that maple syrup is healthier than white sugar. Diabetics need to treat maple syrup and sugar as they do other sugar products.

**Serving Ideas**

- Use Grade A Light and Medium Amber syrups for pancakes, waffles, french toast, or on ice cream.

- Use Grade A Dark Amber syrup in cooking and baking. Its more robust flavor will come through in recipes. Some people also like this grade for pancakes, waffles, etc.

- Use maple syrup for a glaze for ham, chicken, or pork.

- Fill the centers of pared and cored Ohio apples with maple syrup and bake.

- Maple syrup is a delicious sweetener in baked beans, rice pudding, squash, or carrots.

- Make “maple snow.” Cook maple syrup to the hard ball stage (238 degrees F, using candy thermometer) and pour over finely crushed ice.

- Maple syrup can be substituted for granular sugar in almost any baked product with the following modifications to the recipe:
  - Use 1½ cups of syrup for each 1 cup of granulated sugar.
  - Decrease the liquid in a recipe by one-half.
  - Add ¼ teaspoon baking soda for each cup of maple syrup used in substitution.
  - Decrease oven temperature by 25 degrees F.

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*The best way to repackage maple syrup to maintain its quality is to pour the syrup into clean ½ pint, pint, or quart glass freezer jars to one inch from the top and freeze. Heating and “re-canning” the syrup can cause it to darken and change flavor.
Maple Flavored Sweet Potatoes

6 medium sweet potatoes or yams
½ cup Ohio maple syrup
1 tablespoon melted butter or margarine
¼ teaspoon cinnamon
½ cup Ohio apple cider
¼ cup slivered almonds

Cook potatoes until nearly tender; peel and slice into a 10 x 6 x 1½ inch baking dish. Heat the maple syrup, margarine, cinnamon, and cider until just warm (do not boil). Pour over potatoes, sprinkle with almonds.

Bake in 350 degrees F oven for 45 minutes, basting occasionally.

Makes 6 servings.

For more information on maple syrup, contact your local OSU Extension office.

Partially based on research conducted by Barbara Drake (former FCS Educator) and Randy James (former Agriculture and Natural Resources Educator).

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