

Maple Sugaring

at Millbrook Village NJ

Delaware Water Gap
National Recreation Area
National Park Service
New Jersey/Pennsylvania



A Sweet Discovery

Maple sugar: the Algonquin word is *sinzibuckwud* “drawn from wood.” In one legend, Iroquois Chief Woksis, going hunting in early March, yanked his tomahawk from the maple tree where he had left it the night before. All day long, sap dripped from the gash into a vessel at the base of the tree. Woksis’ wife, finding the vessel, tasted the sap and decided that it would do well in the stew. The aroma and taste of the maple sap so pleased Woksis that the collecting of maple sap began.*

In colonial times, sugar was expensive. Most maple sap was boiled down into hard dry maple sugar that was easy to store, rather than used to make the sweet syrup we enjoy today. Sugar was also useful as a preservative and enabled jams or *preserves* to last a long time. Tracts for those interested in immigrating to the New World described making sugar from maple sap as a great attraction—sweet, luxurious sugar, right from one’s own backyard!

A Community Industry

Most early settlers of North America were subsistence farmers whose labor had to provide for all the immediate needs of a family. Maple sugaring required many hands, but occurred in idle time when the weather had just turned warm but spring planting had not yet begun. Sugaring season heralded the end of the winter and was a social and communal enterprise centered around the *sugar shack*. With experience came such refinements as better taps, and iron or copper kettles for boiling.

Maple sugaring was small-scale and labor-intensive and could not compete with the vast sugar cane plantations that came into the United States with the Louisiana Purchase in 1804. After the Civil War, the cost of cane sugar fell considerably, and the import tax on cane sugar was removed. The maple industry declined, though in New England the sale of maple syrup remains to this day an important source of cash and modern *sugarhouses* are still part of the scene.

Maple Sugaring Day

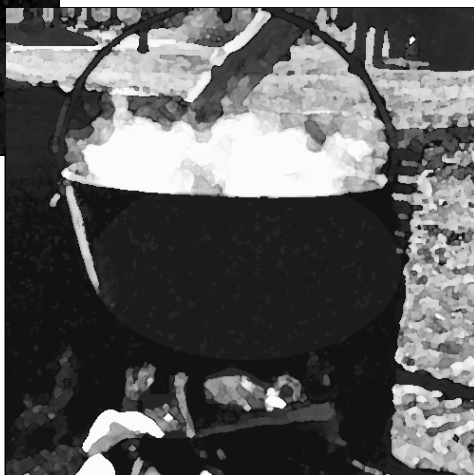
In Millbrook Village, *Maple Sugaring Day* demonstrates all at one time the stages of the sugaring process that would have kept villagers busy for weeks.

As late winter weather fluctuates, rangers tap several trees for sap. (*Tapholes*, about 2½ inches deep, do not damage the tree.) On Sugaring Day, sap collected from village maples is boiled down in cast iron kettles over an open fire to evaporate moisture and create the maple syrup. Both woodstove and outdoor cooking demonstrate the use of maple syrup and sugar in recipes common during the 1800s.



(Above) A taphole and bucket at Millbrook Village.

(Right) A kettle of maple sap boiling at the sugar shack.



Maple Sugaring Day is held on a weekend in March; the exact date depends on weather patterns. Updated information is posted under “Events” on the park website www.nps.gov/dewa.

The event is free and is held outdoors; please dress warmly and wear appropriate footwear.

* Story from *The Maple Sugar Book* by Helen and Scott Nearing (1950) Chelsea Green Publishing.