

Maple Sap to Syrup Walk

walks of art

Presented by  HOLLYFRONTIER.
LUBRICANTS & SPECIALTY
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Explore animated sites
in Downtown Mississauga
and Bradley Museum



Learn how sap from maple trees gets transformed into sweet maple syrup!
Stay within your household group and maintain a safe physical distance of 2m.

Complete the series of family friendly challenges at the Bradley Museums site:

1. Sweet Beginnings

Syrup is made from the sap of hardwood trees like maple, birch and oak. Sap is a sugar water mixture that trees use to grow their leaves in the spring. Maple is the most common syrup because its sap has the highest sugar content. It ranges from 1% to 2% sugar content depending on the variety of maple, the tree itself and climate and environmental factors.

Find the large orange maple leaf.

Maple and other syrups like birch syrup are a part of our diets today because of First Nations peoples who discovered that the clear water leaking from trees in the spring could be turned into syrup and sugar by removing the water. First Nations shared their knowledge of turning sap to sugar with early settlers arriving in Canada. The City of Mississauga is situated on the treaty lands of the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation, and is the traditional territory of the Mississaugas and several other First Nations.

Explore the large, red sign to find out who Kah-ke-wah-quon-a-by was.

Answer: _____

2. Finding the Sweet Spot

The first step in making maple syrup is finding a maple tree, but not just any maple tree will do! There are over 100 varieties of maple trees around the world and 10 that are native to Canada. You have to choose your type of maple carefully because only some varieties have enough sugar in their sap to make it worthwhile to collect to make syrup. The easiest way to identify a maple tree is to look at its leaves. Each type of tree has a different shaped leaf.

Head over to the Log Cabin and look on the porch and doors for cutout maple leaf shapes.

Find all 5 types of maple trees we tap for sap and write down the name of each one.

Answer: _____

Once you've found a maple tree, the next step is to make sure it's the right size. Collecting sap from a tree that is too small will hurt the tree and make it produce less sap and possibly die. Go to the Big Log and you'll find an image of a tree slice that tells you how big a tree should be before you tap or drill a hole in it to collect sap. Once you drill a hole in the tree, you push in a spile to help the sap drip out into a bucket.

Can you find any trees onsite you think are big enough to tap?

3. Sap's on Tap

Trees are tapped in the spring as that is when the sap "flows." In the summer, the leaves of maple trees use photosynthesis to make sugar. This sugar is stored in the tree until the spring time when the weather starts to warm up and the trees get ready to grow leaves. Sap is the "food" the tree uses to grow leaves. Maple sap is typically 98% water and 2% sugar (it looks just like water). We need spring days to go above 0°C and the nights to go below 0°C for the sap to flow in the sapwood of the tree so that we can collect it.

Check the sap buckets on the maple trees. Is the sap dripping for your visit?

Sap is mostly water with just a little sugar. Syrup is mostly sugar with just a little water. That means that we need to collect a lot of sap to make syrup. Typically at the peak of the season it takes 40 buckets of sap to make one bucket of syrup.

Find the wooden wall with 40 silver buckets and 1 red bucket.

4. Sugaring Off

Once the sap has been collected it needs to be turned into syrup. This is done by evaporating, or removing, the water from the sap so the sugar is left behind. For First Nations and early settler families like the Bradleys, this was done at a fire pit.

Find the fire pit to see where maple syrup gets made! Hint: Look for the big metal cauldrons.

Sugaring off was a family activity for both Indigenous and early settler families. Wood had to be cut for the fire and then the fires had to be watched and kept burning. Next, sap had to be carried from the trees to the fire, where fresh sap was added to a large pot or cauldron. As the sap boiled down, it was moved to a second pot or cauldron, where it starts to look like syrup. Before trading with early settlers for metal pots, some Anishinaabe First Nations would make maple sugar by putting hot rocks into sap. Sap would be collected in wooden or clay bowls or birch bark boxes, and poured into a wooden trough. Rocks were heated up in a nearby fire and put into the sap using antlers. Heat from the rocks caused the water to evaporate from the sap, leaving behind maple sugar crystals.

Find the Anishinaabe word for "birch bark box" and say it out loud.

5. Home Sweet Home

Today we use maple syrup most often but for First Nations and the Bradleys their end goal was maple sugar. Maple sugar was easier to store, lasted without refrigeration, and didn't cost any money unlike white or brown sugar.

Search for the maple syrup bottles in the windows of The Bradley House and look for bottles with letters.

Find all the letters and figure out what word they spell to complete this mission!

(Hint: There are 5 letters)

Answer: _____

Have you ever wondered if you could make your own maple syrup at home?

Find the wooden stand with information about starting your own backyard sugar shack!