

TAPPING YOUR OWN TREES

If you are lucky enough to have mature sugar maple trees on your property, here is a quick guide to get you started on tapping your own trees.

1. The tree should be at least 80 cm (32 in) in circumference at chest height. Trees this size are about 40 years old. If the tree has been tapped before, do not re-drill a previous tap hole. New holes should be drilled 15 cm (6 in) to the side and 45 cm (18 in) above or below old tap holes. Tap holes will grow over in several years. Do not put wooden plugs, or any other material in the tap holes at the end of the season. Let them grow over naturally. Use the chart below as a gauge to determine how many tap holes to drill into a tree. If uncertain, always chose the lower number. Never put more than 4 tap holes in a tree, no matter how large it may be. Only tap trees that appear to be healthy.
2. Drill holes into trees with a $\frac{7}{16}$ inch drill bit. Holes should be drilled at a slightly upward angle about 5–6 cm (2–2½ in). Always make sure the spiles used are clean. Sterilize them by boiling in water. Spiles can be purchased at some hardware stores or at farm supply outlets. Hammer in spiles, attach clean pails, preferably with lids (to keep out insects and wind borne debris).
3. Check your pails daily and empty into a large clean storage tank until you are able to boil it. Sap will keep for several days, if cool, but will soon go “sour” and cloudy looking if kept too long. It is unusable if it looks milky. If ice forms in the sap pails remove it carefully. Only the water part of sap freezes. By removing this ‘frozen water’, the remaining sap will have a higher sugar content. It takes approximately 40 litres of sap to produce 1 litre of syrup.
4. It is best to boil the sap outside over a gas burner because of the amount of moisture released. Gas barbeques are generally not recommended. Most are not designed for long term continuous use. The final stages of boiling are crucial and must be watched closely. Using a candy thermometer, the syrup will be ready when it reaches 104°C (219°F). Strain through coffee filters and hot pack into sealed containers.
5. Remove taps at the end of the season, clean all equipment.

Best of all, enjoy your sweet treat!

SIZE (circumference at chest height)	NUMBER OF TAPS
Less than 80cm	No holes
80 cm – 119 cm	1 tap
120 cm – 159 cm	2 taps
160 cm – 199 cm	3 taps
200 cm +	4 taps

