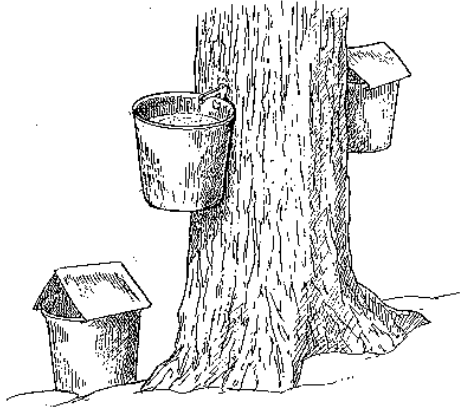


Maple Sugaring Season

by Mel Grosvenor, Naturalist, Greene County Parks

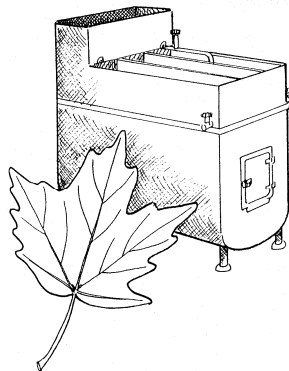


Amidst the sounds of chirping cardinals and munching squirrels, a subtle “drip, drip, drip” can be heard in the winter woods at the back of the Narrows Reserve. It’s maple sugaring season again. The “drips” are droplets of sap from sugar maple trees slowly filling metal buckets which are hung from taps put in at the beginning of February. If you catch one of these ice cold drops on your finger and sample it you almost have to use your imagination to taste its sweetness as it generally only contains 2% sugar. Buckets of sap are transferred to the nearby sugar shack where the excess water is evaporated out by boiling it over a fire. The end product is sticky, sugary liquid gold: pure maple syrup.

Maple sugaring season occurs in mid-winter in Ohio and can go through March if the weather conditions are right. The optimal conditions involve sunny days above freezing and overnight temperatures below freezing. These conditions cause the sap to flow throughout the tree. If it is too cold, the sap won’t flow and if it gets too warm, the buds may start to swell on the trees. The new leaves will require the sugar at that point and the sap is considered “skunked” which is as bad as it sounds. Old timers used to call the last sap run of the season the “frog run”. If it’s warm enough for frogs to be calling, it’s warm enough for the leaves to pop out and the sap is no longer sweet. Maple sugaring season is very brief to begin with and a stretch of the wrong weather can swiftly ruin it.



The process of converting watery sap into thick, tasty syrup is quite time consuming.



First the trees need tapped and the buckets hung. Sap buckets need emptied, which means a hike up a steep, often snow-covered hill to empty thirty or more buckets. A fire needs built and maintained under the evaporator pan and on average the sap needs boiled around eight hours. It takes a good deal of sap to make the finished product. About forty gallons of sap will give you just one gallon of syrup. Sap that is close to becoming syrup is then finished over a stove which fills the kitchen with steam and a most delightful aroma, and finally you have a

batch of nature's best pancake topping.

Most store brand syrup has a scant amount of real maple in it, if there is any at all. It contains corn syrup which is cheaper and more convenient to produce. You've got to try the real thing! It's healthier for you! There's nothing added and no ingredients you cannot pronounce. So on Saturday, March 1st, treat yourself and your family to the sweet taste of pure maple syrup at our **Annual Maple Sugar Pancake Breakfast** and take a tour of the sugar camp to learn all about the process, from its history to modern techniques and watch syrup as it is being made right before your eyes. For additional information, visit our web site at www.co.greene.oh.us/parks, click on "Events" and then over to Maple Sugaring & Pancake Breakfast. We hope to see you there!

