

2011 Brown County 4-H Maple Syrup Project

How to Tap a Tree

1st Find a Sugar Maple Tree:

If possible find a **12 inch diameter Sugar Maple** close to your house. Try to identify the tree in the fall when the leaves are still on it. Once identified, mark the tree with brightly colored surveyor's tape or ribbon so that you can easily find it in the winter.

Sugar Maples are large trees, 40-60' tall. Their bark is grey-brown with rough vertical grooves. The five lobed leaves turn a bright yellow in the fall when the trees are the easiest to identify. The leaves have moderately deep U-shaped notches between the lobes.

Black Maple leaves have more shallow lobes and drooping edges. The sap is just as good for sugaring.

Silver Maple has a more greyish bark and the undersides of the leaves are sometimes hairy. The sap is slightly less sweet, but is still good for sugaring.

Red Maples have smooth grey bark and the leaves have very shallow notches. The leaves turn red in the fall and the sap is not particularly sweet and so the trees are not good for sugaring.

2nd Collect three plastic gallon milk jugs:

Wash each jug out thoroughly and replace the lids. Have a responsible elder take a small bladed knife and cut an inverted square sided "U" just under the lip of the screw on lid and push the "U" inside the jug with the top of the "U" acting as a hinge. This cut should be made directly opposite the jug handle.

3rd stop by your 4-H Leader's house and pick up your spile:

Once you are committed to the project, let your 4-H leader know, so that I can order enough spiles.

4th Wait until late winter when the sap starts to flow and your 4-H leader calls and tells you it is time to TAP!!

I will call your 4-H leader in late winter, the end of February or early March, when the nights are below freezing and the daytime temperature rises above. Your leader will then call you and tell you to tap your tree.

It is best to tap on a warm sunny afternoon so that the tree bark is not frozen solid. Otherwise hammering in the spile can crack the bark.

Have your responsible elder tap your tree. Tap on the southern or eastern side of the tree where the bark gets the most sun. Find a large root and measure about two feet up the trunk above the root. Drill in to the tree at a slightly upwards angle, so the hole angles down and out. This way the sap will not collect in the hole and freeze and damage the tree. Use a 7/16ths drill bit and drill about two inches into the bark. Make sure to get out all of the loose wood and try to keep the sides of the drill hole sharp.

Gently hammer the spile into the bark with the bucket hanger facing upwards.

Hang the gallon jug on the tap and wait for it to fill up with sap. It should be filled within one to two days if the flow is good. Tape over the "U" hole with duct tape and place the jug into the fridge, with your mother's permission, until you bring down all three jugs to Straight Creek Valley Farm for the boil down.

5th Come down to Straight Creek Valley Farm for the Boil Down the next weekend:

Bring back the spile.

Bring a glass pint canning jar with a lid.

Dump your collected sap into the evaporator and watch it boil and bring home some Brown County Maple Syrup!

Directions to Straight Creek Valley Farm:

From Georgetown, head south on US 68 towards Ripley, and head down the hill, passing Landmark on your left.

At the bottom of the hill turn right on Straight Creek Road.

Go exactly two miles down the road, past the three mailboxes on your right and past a low barn on your right.

Turn right at the old tobacco barn and park wherever you can without getting stuck. Four Wheel Drive might be a good idea!