

inSTALLations



March 2010

Nature Notes

Seasonal Sweets Maple Syrup



The people of this area have enjoyed maple syrup for hundreds of years. This sweet treat can only be produced in late winter and early spring when days are warm and nights are cold. Under these conditions the sap, which is last year's stored energy, flows from the roots toward the branches. We intercept that flow with a hole and a tap, collecting the dripping sap in buckets. As long as a tree is healthy and large enough, tapping the tree does not affect its ability to produce leaves or seeds.

All maple species produce sap with a high sugar content, but Black Maple is the best sugar producer with an average sugar content of 5%. Sugar Maples have an average sugar content of 3% while Box Elder and Silver Maple have even less. It takes approximately 40 gallons of sap to produce 1 gallon of syrup. The boiling of the sap produces copious amounts of steam as the water is evaporated out of the sap. We know the sap is done when it reaches the right density as measured by a hydrometer.



Stop by the Sugarhouse on March weekends from 1:30-4:30pm to see the process in action.

As you walk through the Beech Maple woods here at CNC, look for taps in the maple trees. You can often find the holes where taps were located in previous years.

The amount of sap produced varies by tree. Some can produce more than a gallon a day, while others are always slow drippers.



Sap turns cloudy and bitter once the buds begin opening. The syruping season is over when this happens.

The sunny side of a trunk will often start flowing earlier in the day than the shady side.

You may be able to find *sapsicles* in the woods where a broken branch drips sap and freezes. Squirrels and other wildlife enjoy these treats.

Visit the Temporary Visitor Center for program information.

This inSTALLation is available online at www.chippewanaturecenter.org under the Naturalist Section.