

# Grandma's Shoestring



## Homesteading on a Budget

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### "Oh Sugar, Sugar!" (Syrup, Really)

**"Why not just buy it at the store?"** You can get a jug of it for about five bucks."

My friend obviously has no homesteader spirit.

Of course we could buy our maple syrup at the store...but why would we want to?

The story is that it was my eight year old granddaughter's idea, but I know better- her Daddy is really an eight year old at heart.

Daddy, the girls and I walked the half mile into the maple-filled woods and got to work. (As usual, Grandma got roped into the project.)

It's cold out for early March in southeast Michigan, but that's actually a good thing for us. According to the [Michigan Maple Syrup Association](#), sap usually starts running here in what we call "the February thaw," but since there was a VERY SHORT warm spell, we are still able to collect sap in a rush. (If it weren't for the last minute, nothing would get done around here!)



Daddy getting ready to "tap the sap!"

Since we'd never done this before, we decided to make our own taps and collection system. It seems like a fine idea- - the sap is pouring out!

On our first sap collection day (four days after tapping) we discovered the good, the bad, and the disconnected.

One tube had popped out of the collection bucket, so we lost some sap. Another tree had given us very little of her offering. But, then we saw "Big Mama"- our juiciest-maple yet! She gave us about 1/2 of a gallon, which was by far the

most of all of our trees.

After we dumped all the collected sap into our carrying bucket, we saw that we had only collected a gallon and a half. Oh, well. It was our first try after all.

Hmmm. . .it is a forty to one ratio from sap to syrup; a gallon and half should make. . .not much.

ADVENTUROUS?  
Syrup instructions are on page 2.

READ ABOUT OUR  
"MELTDOWN" ON  
PAGE 3!

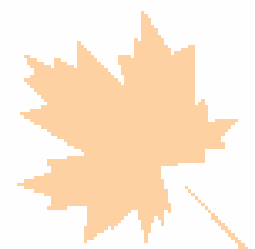
Find this & more useful articles at  
[www.thesurvivalnut.com](http://www.thesurvivalnut.com)

#### Useful Maple Syrup Links:

- [Michigan Maple Syrup Assn.](#)
- [Vermont Maple Sugar Makers Assn.](#)
- [Pennsylvania Maple Syrup](#)
- [Massachusetts Maple Producers Assn.](#)
- [New Hampshire Maple Producers](#)
- [University of Maine](#)
- [Ohio State University](#)

**"And the Lord God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground--trees that were pleasing to the eye & good for food."**

--Genesis 2:9



# Collecting Sap

## Materials List:

- ◆ Tubing (we use about 1 foot of vinyl tube for each tap)
- ◆ Spout (store bought or improvised spout made from whatever is lying around)
- ◆ Hose clamps (if needed)
- ◆ Collection container (gallon milk jugs are ideal!)
- ◆ Rope or twine
- ◆ Cordless Drill w/ right size bit
- ◆ Safety Glasses
- ◆ Hammer
- ◆ 8 penny nails (one for each tree)

We had some old 1/2 inch copper tubing lying around, so we used a hacksaw to cut it into 5 inch sections. A couple of holes we drilled in the top of the tubing to allow sap to enter, and there it was- a tap for sap.

Every hardware store sells vinyl tubing. You just need to make sure that the inner diameter is larger than the outer diameter of your tap. Cut a one foot section for each tap. (We used hose clamps to secure the tubing, but they really aren't necessary.)

\*\*\*Don't attach the tubing until AFTER you have inserted the tap into the tree!\*\*\*

We drilled our holes about 3-4 inches deep. Gentle hammering will set the tap snugly into its bore. Set a nail about 2 inches above the tap. After the vinyl hose has been attached, run it into the empty milk jug. Tie a piece of twine to the jug handle and nail, and pray for a sunny day!

Sap containers should be checked every day, or at least every other day. Sap can spoil!



Drilling out holes for sap collection.

Beyonce is rumored to have followed the "Maple Syrup Diet" in order to lose weight for the movie *Dream Girls*.

Source: [Memphis News Channel 3](#)



Poking holes to get the stored up sap. (Make sure your battery is charged up before you go!)

## Did you know . . .

. . . that maple syrup has several different quality grades?

According to the Massachusetts Maple Producers Association ([www.massmaple.org/grading.html](http://www.massmaple.org/grading.html)), "Pure maple syrup is graded according to Federal USDA regulations, and is based on both color and flavor. The grades are: US Grade A Light Amber, US Grade A Medium Amber, US Grade A Dark Amber, and US Grade B."

Each grade has specific characteristics that make it desirable for the table, for baking or for specialty foods. For more information visit <http://www.massmaple.org>.

Cost: *It depends!* (Our goal is to always pinch pennies so tightly that Abraham Lincoln complains!)

Used Milk Jugs: \$0

Used Twine from Hay Bales: \$0

Spouts: Costs Vary

Vinyl Tubing: \$0.80/foot

Cordless Drill: You Should Already Own One!

Nails: About a nickel each

Labor: \$0

Memories: *PRICELESS!*

For more detailed instructions, visit [http://www.mi-maplesyrup.com/Activities/activities\\_homemade.htm](http://www.mi-maplesyrup.com/Activities/activities_homemade.htm) or <http://www.umext.maine.edu/onlinepubs/PDFpubs/7036.pdf>



# the meltdown!!!

Boiling or “melting down” the sap is probably the easiest part of producing maple syrup.

Depending on the weather and our gathering schedule, we accumulate as much as one gallon per tree per collection.

We have eight trees tapped, so do the math. Oh yeah, a gallon of sap weighs about 9 lbs. (Carrying the sap a 1/2 mile doesn't seem like a

big deal, but it gets heavy when you've got the weight of the yoke and eight gallons on your neck as you are sloshing through the slush and mud!)

If you have a lot of sap, you can kind of “set it & forget it” because it can take quite some time to boil. Go darn socks or something. Eat bonbons & watch Oprah. I don't know, but the point is, you really can take a break.

JUST  
MAKE  
SURE YOU  
DON'T  
BURN  
YOUR  
SYRUP!



A candy thermometer is a helpful aid. Finished maple syrup boils at about 7 degrees Fahrenheit above water (which is generally 212 degrees). Taste and syrup thickness are useful determinants as well. For a large operation, a hydrometer is necessary.

## Making the Most of Maple

Before boiling, maple sap contains approximately 2-4% sugar.

Finished maple syrup contains 64-66% sugar.

It can take up to 40 gallons of maple sap to make one gallon of maple syrup.

Maple sap can be boiled down and used as syrup (remember, it will be thinner than non-maple syrup—you know, the fake stuff), maple candy, maple fudge, maple sugar and many other concoctions.

Maple sap contains no artificial preservatives, no fertilizers & no pesti-

cides. It does contain beneficial nutrients and is a ready energy source.

For recipes, go to Cornell University's maple resource page at <http://maple.dnr.cornell.edu/recipes.htm> or visit the Weston A. Price website at <http://www.westonaprice.org/motherlinda/maple.html>.

## “MEMORIES, pressed between the pages of my mind. . .”

That's right, Elvis- - those golden memories are what make life living.

The decision to make maple syrup wasn't completely “spur of the moment.” Each new adventure is a part of our family philosophy.

Our homesteading mentality is not simply about hard work, self-sufficiency & basic survival. Of course it includes those things, but it is also about creating an environment where the adults & children can

interact in meaningful ways to create a shared experience. We'll have an opportunity to look back years later and continue to enjoy our good times together.

*“Quiet thoughts come floating down  
And settle softly to the ground*

*Like golden autumn leaves around my feet*

*I touched them and they burst apart with sweet memories,*

*Sweet memories . . .”*



PHOTO GALLERY



From tree . . .



. . . to tap . . .



. . . to plate . . .

Future Issues:  
"Here, Piggy, Piggy!"  
"If it's FREE, it's for Me!"  
. . . and More!



- -the finished product!

