



Maple Syrup



by William M. Cook

As I write this, it is November. Snow from a few days ago is mostly melted and I am thinking if I can rake the last few autumn leaves this weekend. However, when you read this it will be midwinter, and the landscape will be deep in dormancy under the seasonal snowpack. But, spring is coming, and one of my first and favorite signs is hidden except to those who know where to look.

Beginning in February, I start to watch the weather forecast for the first multi-day thaw. Not because I dread cold weather; in fact the opposite. But, deep inside all our maple trees something

is stirring. Yes, I am talking about spring sap flow and, if you know how to produce it, maple syrup.

For the last several years, I have experimented with producing small amounts of maple syrup from my yard, and from a few of my neighbors'. Not a lot—just enough for my family's use, and to have a few bottles to give away to friends. But it has become a seasonal ritual that I enjoy, and it gives me an opportunity to spend a little time outside as winter gives way to spring. It also helps me cultivate connections with my neighbors as well.

In maple trees, as well as a few other trees such as black walnuts, there is a period in the early spring when clear and mildly sweet sap runs from the roots to the branches, waking the crown up from the winter's rest. Sap does return from underground in all deciduous trees in the spring, but only in 20 or so species in our region can you collect the sap.

Probably the first crafty person to figure out how to make syrup was someone who stood under a maple that was damaged by a winter storm and they felt a drip on their head from a broken branch. The brave soul decided to taste the sap and discovered it slightly sweet and refreshing. Then someone figured out they could collect it, and concentrate it to make a sticky syrup.

All maple trees produce good tasting sap. Sugar maples are famously the preferred species, because their sap has a (relatively) high sugar concentration (up to 2%) and they

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What's Up in the Gardens End of the Season

by Joan Andersen

Recently I talked with Nia Primus, Gardens Supervisor, to get her thoughts on the 2017 season. The big picture was that the growing season started out cool so annuals took a while to take off. The weather finally warmed up and annuals were fabulous by the middle of July. There are so many plants that it is hard to choose favorites. Plants that bloom like crazy and are not too much work for the gardeners will definitely

make the 'Top Ten' list. Here are some of Nia's favorites:

Begonia 'Art Hodes' may not have the prettiest name but it is a great begonia. It has large textured leaves of dark green and bronze and grows to 2-3 feet. It needs shade and will do well in a larger container. This plant is grown for interesting foliage, although it will produce some white flowers.

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produce a larger total amount over the month or so that the sap might run. But silver, Norway, red, and other maples are also good, and even box elder (a somewhat disguised maple relative). I tap silver and Norway maples, which produce good sugar concentrations but less total sap than sugar maples. Box elders have a lower sugar concentration.

So, how do you make your own syrup? At a basic level, you need very little equipment. A cordless drill, a 5/8" or 7/8" bit, a metal spile or tap, a mallet or hammer, and a clean bucket or pail. You probably have all of these things already except the taps, which cost only \$3-4 apiece from Fleet Farm or your local hobby store. Wait until the weather warms up enough in February that there is going to be several days forecast with daytime temperatures above freezing, and set your first tap.

Find a maple tree at least 10 inches in diameter. Smaller than that, you risk damaging your tree. Drill a hole about 2" deep in the trunk, angled slightly downwards. The south side of the tree will warm up first, so maybe make your first hole there. Make sure your tap and your drill bit are the same size—there are two common sizes as above. Gently pound the tap into the hole with the hammer. You don't need it in deep, just in far enough that it will stick. Now, hang your bucket on the tap.

If the trees are ready, sap may immediately start dripping out of the tap. [Or not—it might be too early. In that case, just wait.] Taste a little! The first ice-cold drink tastes wonderful to me, refreshingly cold water with just a little sweet taste. Then let the rest drip into the bucket and come back to collect later.

At the end of a warmish day (sunny with temperatures in the 30s or 40s) somewhere from half a gallon to (in extreme) two gallons of sap might drip out of a tap. Pour into something you can carry inside, and make your first syrup.

Sap is converted into syrup by boiling. A lot of boiling. From a good tree on a good day, a gallon of sap might produce as "much" as 2/3rd cup of syrup. On a bad day, half that, and you aren't guaranteed a gallon of sap. So if you tap just one tree, you probably will get only a few smaller bottles in a season.



You remember how long it takes a large pot of water to boil. Now remember that you are boiling away the vast majority of the water, leaving concentrated syrup behind. A big pot with multiple gallons of sap might take a couple of hours to boil down. Pro tip (or semi-pro): stay there next to the stove, or set an alarm to go off after half an hour. You need to check your boiling sap repeatedly.

After enough boiling on high, you will see the sap/syrup start to darken when

you have boiled away enough water that the sugars are visible. When that happens, don't leave the stove. Turn the heat down a little, and watch. Eventually there will be a thin layer of concentrated sap on the bottom of your pot. Finally it will start to bubble noticeably, and foam will begin to rise in the pot. This means both that your syrup is almost done and that it can burn with a moment's inattention. You don't want it to burn. I have done that several times and I am always furious with myself.

After it foams, stir and watch it boil for another couple of minutes and take it off the heat before the last water boils away. Now you have a little syrup! Taste it—you made that, with the help of Mother Nature. You can put it in a jar in the fridge, or can it if you have enough (this will take several days with just a small number of taps).

The sap looks like water, but it is surprisingly spoilable. After a few hours in warm weather it can smell off, and you have lost that bucket. I check my taps 1-2 times daily and boil the sap mostly down that day. At the point the sap darkens due to concentration, I tend to take that off the heat and save several days' worth to do the final careful boiling all at once. At that point it doesn't take up much room in the fridge, so this isn't a problem.

Over the next few weeks, watch the weather carefully. On days when the nights are below freezing and the days above, sap will run. If there are a couple of nights in the 30s, it will stop, as it also will if the day doesn't get up to freezing. Don't give up yet and take the buckets down—the weather will probably change, and the sap will run again.

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*What's Up in the Gardens End of the Season,
continued from page 1*

Impatiens 'Bounce Pink Flame' is very resistant to downy mildew, a fungal disease that has infected regular impatiens so that they can no longer be planted in the Gardens. It has wonderful bicolor hot pink blossoms that seem to glow. It grows 10-24" with a similar spread. 'Bounce' will thrive and bloom in shade, but will take sun if it is well watered.

Angelonia 'Angelface' pink and blue is a reliable annual that produces flower spikes all summer long. It tolerates cooler weather but really loves summer heat. Angelonia grows 18-24" or 18-30" tall, depending on the color. New flower spikes cover the old stems, so dead-heading is not necessary.

Supertunia 'Giant Pink' is a vigorous petunia covered with hot pink flowers. It grows only 6-12" tall but it will trail for up to 36" so it works well as a "spiller" in hanging baskets or tall containers. It can also be grown in the garden and makes an excellent plant at the front of a bed because it is low and bushy.

Gomphrena 'Forest Pink' is an airy plant growing up to 24-26" tall. The deep pink flowers are globe shaped and are on long stems above the foliage so this plant mixes well with others. It looks nice in flower beds and containers.

Argyranthemum 'Double Yellow' has bold bright yellow daisy flowers and grows 10-14" x 12-14". It likes both gardens and containers and will do well even if the weather is cool.

Salvia 'Magic Wand' was developed by crossing a wild species with a salvia farinacea. This plant has an upright habit and produces tall blue flower spikes. It can grow 2-4' tall so it looks great in the



garden or a large container. Flowers last a long time, but an occasional dead-heading will encourage more blooms. Salvia 'Saucy Wine' has burgundy purple flower spikes over nice green foliage. It will grow and bloom all season and will reach a height of 2-3' with similar width. Grow it in a large container or in a garden bed.

Begonia 'Go Go' is a tuberous begonia suited to containers and gardens. It is a compact plant only 8-18" x 8-18" but produces very large flowers in shades of yellow, orange, apricot, red, rose, pink, and white. This is an excellent shade plant in moist, well-drained soil. Avoid hot sun or the leaves may scorch.

Hypoestes is also known as polka dot plant because the leaves are covered in spots or dots. This plant comes in color combinations of green/white, green/pink, and red/green. Recent cultivars have been introduced that have deeper

colors. It is so reliable that it is used as an edger in many areas in Munsinger Gardens because it always grows well. It has a mounded form and the colorful leaves look great even though the plant does not flower. It likes part sun and will tolerate heat and dry weather.

Begonias and impatiens are more tender but many of the plants on this list of favorites will grow well into fall. It is necessary to remove annuals while the seasonal garden staff is still working and it is sad to pull annuals that are still looking beautiful. But, the garden beds must be cleaned up for winter by the end of October. Straw is put over newly planted perennials, tropical plants are moved back to the greenhouse, and the water system and fountains are shut down for the winter. The final day for seasonal gardeners was November 9. It was a wonderful season, and plans are well underway for the gardens of 2018.

Using Water Responsibly in the Home Landscape



by Joan Andersen, Stearns County Extension Master Gardener

Those of us who love to grow plants, trees, and shrubs and maintain a nice lawn are faced with a lot of questions. How do we achieve the results we hope for without spending more time and money than we want to spend? University of Minnesota Extension Educators have created a place with answers to your questions on the Extension Yard and Garden website. The program is called “Water Wisely” and it is designed to help homeowners do a better job of using water in the landscape and still have their plants look good. It can be found here: <http://z.umn.edu/waterwise>.

Even though we live in the “Land of 10,000 Lakes” (and lots of rivers, ponds, swamps, and bogs!) and usually receive adequate rainfall, we still need to use that water in the best possible way. It is possible that Minnesota’s weather may be affected by climate change and that we will see more weather extremes in terms of temperature and precipitation. A lot of treated drinking water is used on lawns and gardens, so it pays to conserve. If you live on a city water system, you pay for the water you use. Even if you have a well, you still pay to pump the water out of the ground. In either case, water is not an endless resource.

All homeowners should understand the importance of knowing their yard and growing conditions. Your soil type, soil pH, and the amount of sun the site receives are very important when selecting plants. A soil test should be done. The test will tell you the soil type, pH, and soil texture. Compost should be added to sandy soil to improve water retention, and to clay soil to improve drainage and allow air to get to the roots. Pay attention to microclimates that exist on your site—some places may be very hot and others may be cool and damp. I have found that the plant will tell you if it is happy or not. If something needs water all the time, the site may be too hot or sunny. If the plant is flopping over or looking like it is going to rot, it is in a site with too much water or poor drainage for that plant. Fortunately, some plants prefer hot and dry and some like their roots very damp, so there is a plant for just about every condition.

The University has a plant selection tool that can help the homeowner choose plants that are likely to do well in a site without a lot of extra care. It is called “Plant Elements of Design” and it can be found here: <http://landscapeplants.extension.umn.edu>. Use this interactive site to help you choose plants that will grow in your area and specific conditions. Perennials should be grown in conditions they like, based on

sun and shade, size, and amount of water needed so you are not watering all the time or finding that the plant just does not thrive. If you do want to grow plants that need more water, group them together close to a water source to make it easier to water. Plants that prefer drier conditions can be planted farther away.

It is especially important to choose the right trees and shrubs for a site, since they live a long time and are difficult to remove. Proper planting and care of trees is very important until they are fully established. Depending on the size of the new tree, it may need supplemental water for up to 7 years during dry periods, until the tree is fully established.

Use soaker hoses for perennial beds and vegetable gardens whenever possible. The water goes exactly where you want it and is not hitting the leaves or evaporating into the air. Shrubs and trees should be watered in the root area out to the dripline. Most plants are better off if their leaves stay dry—it reduces the chance of fungal diseases. Another thing you can do is use rain barrels or buckets to collect rainwater. Containers and garden plants really benefit from rainwater because the pH is neutral. Apply mulch to perennial beds to retain moisture, reduce weeds, and moderate soil temperature. If applying mulch around trees, keep it away from the trunks of the trees. Mulch around trees should be shaped like doughnuts, not cones. If you have mulch piled up around the trunks of your trees, pull it away.

A lot of water is applied to lawns, so it is important to water correctly. Apply water early in the day when it is not hot or windy, and water deeply to encourage deep healthy roots. Then wait for the soil to begin to dry out before watering again. If you have a sprinkler system, add a rain sensor so sprinklers won’t run when it is raining outside. Or, start the sprinklers manually only when water is needed. Check to see that the sprinklers are watering the lawn evenly and adjust the heads as needed. Also, make sure that you are not watering the driveway or some other area of your yard that does not need water. Water needs are affected by your soil type. A soil test can tell you what the soil conditions are under that layer of grass. Sandy soils need more water than poorly drained clay soils. Avoid cutting the lawn too short. It is tempting to do that so you don’t have to mow so often, but short grass means short roots and the grass will suffer in hot dry weather.

Paying attention to proper watering practices will give you a healthy lawn, trees, and gardens while conserving a precious water resource and saving money on your water bill.

November 12, 2017, Snow Stories

by Idella Moberg

In winter it snows here in Minnesota. Snow falls upon us in many different forms. We talk about snow. We tell stories about snow. We're proud of our snow. Sometimes we're afraid of it. Sometimes we're sick of it. Here are a few thoughts and observations I have about snow.

Snow Flakes. No two are exactly alike. A snow flake is formed when a dust particle in the atmosphere attracts super-cooled cloud water droplets which freeze into a crystal form. Six points characterize the shape of a snow flake. They resemble lace doilies—or rather is it that lace doilies resemble snow flakes? They fall from the sky and cover everything in sight. Trillions of them. They cover everything with teeny tiny icy lace. Children and other people make paper snow flakes with scissors. Get some paper. Fold it. Cut it along the folded edges. Open it up. See the pretty snow flake you've made. Hang it on your Christmas tree and on your windows.

A picture memory: A first snowfall comes into focus. Big feather flakes wafting down, in no hurry to end their floating fall. Two small boys squeal with delight and run here and there catching them. In their hands, on their sleeves, on their noses and tongues. At last with a sort of ballet spin the boys flop down flat on their backs and watch the snow begin to cover them as though they are the ground.

Smiling faces of Elaine and Ramona appear in my mind. One is seventy something. One is in her eighties. They stand an arm's length apart in fluffy snow over four feet deep. With arms spread wide they count—one, two, three—and together they free fall backwards onto the snow. Then they flap their arms and legs to make angels in the snow.

We often drive through wind and snow. We were starting home from the lake one winter as snow flurries whirled and swirled in gusty wind across fields and open spaces. As we drove, the wind picked up, blowing snow across the road and straight at the windshield. We couldn't see. By the time we came to Mora the wind had reached blizzard speed. The road disappeared into swirling whiteness. Temperatures dropped below zero. We couldn't see the road, or the ditch, or other cars on the road. We drove by memory, mostly, to the Mora Motel and checked into the last available. Lucky us, lucky us, we say. We won't freeze to death or blow away today. We'll sit it out, we say, watch TV until the weather clears. We turn on the television and discover a buzzing snow storm on the screen. So we'll talk and tell stories until we're too tired not to sleep on the fleabag squeaky bed.



I've driven undaunted through every kind of winter weather, but I swear that sleet and freezing rain are going to do me in one of these days. The last time I drove through freezing rain I was on the freeway in the Cities. My windshield wipers smeared wet icy snow across my windshield. The air was smeared with wet icy snow. Going south on I-694, the road veers east and becomes I-494. At this bend in the road cars were sliding off the road and into the ditch. I am driving fast. Too fast to make the turn. I'm sliding right toward a highway patrol man. He stands there as though this will prevent me from colliding with him and all the cars in the ditch. But I'm going to take him with me and slide onto the growing pile of vehicles. Pump the brakes down up down up. Rock the steering wheel back and forth. In slow motion I slide too fast to stop. The patrol man and I lock eyes in mortal contact. Suddenly, through no skillful driving by me, inches away from hitting the unmoving man, my car turns ever so nicely around the curve, and I continue on my way.

I love being snowed in. I don't mind shoveling the driveway. Someone else can shovel the roof. Making snowmen is fun. And snow houses. And having a snowball fight. I admire the snow sculptures in Ely. A good snow cover is good for the garden. But at the end of winter, when the snow gets old, yellow, gray, I'm happy to see it go.

Rose Garden Review for 2017

by Joan Andersen

The year 2017 turned out to be another great season for roses. Weather is always interesting, but the season ended with many weeks of weather perfect for growing roses, and many plants kept flowering well into fall. In October, the weather gradually cooled down with days in the 40s that allowed the roses to harden off. Once the forecast looked too cold for tender plants, the roses were cut back to 10" and the rice hull mulch was removed. Mulch had been applied to each plant to cover the graft/root zone out to the drip line. This year a different product called Mississippi Topsoil (made in Cold Spring, MN) was used instead of compost. Deb Keiser, Rose Specialist, observed that this product has been used in other areas of the Gardens and has proved to have no weed seeds plus it contains slow release nutrients that roses love. On November 8,

staff began installing construction blankets for winter protection. Blankets are put on Virginia Clemens and the upper test rose gardens because most of the plants in those areas must have winter cover.

Because most growers want to grow plants that don't require constant spraying to keep the foliage healthy, rose breeders are emphasizing disease resistance when new roses are chosen to be put on the market. The famous 'Knockout' series of roses from Will Radler set a new standard for clean foliage, and there are more roses being developed that have 'Knockout' parentage. Meiland Roses from France is also hybridizing for disease resistant foliage.

Some of Deb's favorite plants from Star Roses in 2017: 'Canyon Road' (Meiland) is a bushy floribunda that is 3-1/2' x 2-1/2' with unusual brick red, very double

blooms that are borne in clusters. It grew fast and bloomed all the time. It is more wide than tall so it is a great plant for filling in a sunny space.

'Gilded Sun' (Meiland) is a tall floribunda that can grow up to 5' with rich golden yellow double blooms that grow in clusters. It grows on its own roots. In 2017 it grew fast and got quite tall and was loaded with flowers.

'Shining Moment' (Radler) is a bushy floribunda that grows up to 4-1/2' with bright pink double flowers that could be described as iridescent, plus it is slightly fragrant. It grows on its own roots and is rated for zones 5-9. This rose will benefit from some winter protection, but since it is on its own roots it should come back even if the canes die back to the ground.

'Mother of Pearl' (Meiland) is a tall grandiflora with elegant apricot/salmon pink blooms with a hybrid tea shape. It will grow about 4' x 2' and is slightly fragrant. It bloomed very well in the Gardens in 2017.

'Candy Cane Cocktail' (Meiland/Radler) is a floribunda with blooms described as multicolored—no two are exactly alike. Flowers are white or pale pink with darker pink edges and they are very double. The plant grows on its own roots. In the Gardens it produced long arching canes with many flowers.

As roses are gradually replaced, emphasis will continue to be on disease-resistant cultivars. Rose gardeners watch for problems and apply pesticides only when absolutely necessary—choosing the safest product to do the job. It is very difficult to find a time to use pesticides in a public garden because visitors are always there. Another benefit of growing disease-resistant cultivars is to the bees, butterflies, and other pollinators that visit the flowers and depend on them for pollen and nectar.

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Maple Syrup, continued from page 2

In a good year sap may run on and off for a month. By sometime between late March and mid-April at the latest, depending on the weather and the tree species, spring becomes firmly established and the sap drips stop entirely. Take the buckets down until next winter, remove the tap, and let the tree heal.

Taking some sap doesn't hurt your tree, within reason. If the tree isn't 10" in diameter, it isn't mature enough so don't tap it. If it is really huge, you can put two taps in. Note what old tap holes look like—they can be visible for several years. Drill new holes at least a couple of inches to the left or right of old holes, and even better at a different height.

I will probably be tapping 8-10 trees this spring, but the first year it was just one. But I live in town, with only a few maple trees around. If you get really into this and have a maple forest, you could tap many more. However, that quickly becomes a big job, and with more than 8-10 trees you overwhelm your ability to boil on a kitchen stove, and you need to build a setup outside. But that's for the really serious producers, more serious than me.

Now, here I am, back to autumn in front of my laptop. Someday soon it will snow, and the snow will stick for the winter. But now I am thinking ahead a few months. Thinking ahead to that week in late winter when I can recklessly go outside without a hat. When the snow starts to melt, and the ground softens. When I can swig my first cup of raw sap of the season. I love that time of year, and the syrup ritual has become my marker of the beginning of spring. You can celebrate it too.

Announcing Photo Contest Winners

by Mary Margaret Bjorklun

Late November brought an end to the annual Munsinger Clemens photo contest. Winners were announced at a reception on Saturday afternoon November 18 at the Great River Regional Library. Contest participants were divided into two age groups, youth through 18, and adult. Entries were categorized as landscapes or hardscapes. Steve Fines, an area photography professional, served as the judge. He displays his art on two websites, *FinesAerial.com* and *FinesArt.com*.

Congratulations to the winners:

Best-of-Show Susan Aune "*Reflections*"

Landscape • Adult

First Place Marly Keller "*Lamp Post Path*"

Second Place Marly Keller "*Mississippi Colors from Munsinger*"

Third Place Susan Aune "*Purple Majesty*"

Hardscape • Adult

First Place Alexandra Kimmerle "*To Sit by Such Beauty*"

Second Place Alexandra Kimmerle "*Hiding Beauty*"

Third Place John Roscoe "*Hebe, Cupbearer of the Gods*"

Landscape • Youth

First Place Ellie Terhaar "*Beside The Rose Garden*"

Second Place Abigail Gans "*Winter Wonderland*"

First Place Ellie Terhaar "*On The Fence*"

Hardscape • Youth

First Place Ellie Terhaar "*Into The Garden*"

Second Place Zoe Shay "*Anastasia*"

Third Place Kalli Terhaar "*Blue Dynasty*"

Winning photos will be hung throughout the Saint Cloud community:

January—Saint Cloud Hospital

February—Studio C, Paramount Theatre

March—US Bank

April—CentraCare Plaza

May and June—Whitney Senior Center

July and August—River's Edge Convention Center

September—Waite Park Public Library

October—Quiet Oaks Hospice House

November and December—Great River Regional Library

Thanks to all the contest participants, to judge Steve Fines, and to committee members who diligently planned and facilitated this year's contest: Chris Felsch, Larry Grover, Jack Kelly, Nia Primus, Bette Raffenburg, and Bruce Regan.

Photos for next year's contest can be taken January 1 through November 1, 2018. The calendar dates include all four seasons: the Gardens resting in winter, surprises of spring, full floral color of summer, and the fading but still beautiful colors of fall. Photos throughout the seasons remind us of visual pleasures all year long. Please consider participating in the 2018 contest and encouraging friends and family members also to participate. Visit the web site for more information, www.munsingerclemens.com.



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Thanks for the Root Beer Floats!

MCBS is grateful to the following local businesses that made generous donations to help us provide the root beer floats served at the 2017 Music in the Gardens summer concerts:

Kemps Bernick Coborn's
Dairy Queen on 25th Strategic Equipment

Thank you also to the District 742 InnStep students and to Sally Koester for wrapping spoons and straws, and to the Gardens staff who helped us set up and take down, and to our stalwart volunteer servers:

Mary Margaret & Gene Bjorklund	Sally Koester
John Carter	Kathy Mathies
Ginny Clendenin	Vera Peterson
Chris & John Felsch	Joyce Pohl
Marlene & Bill Haider	Bette Raffenebeul
Larene Hark	Nikki Rajala
Jack Kelly	Bruce Regan
Bev & Norm Koepf	Mary & Don Rethmeier
	Patsy Schelske

Sincere thanks to all of you—we couldn't do it without you! Plus a very special thanks to Elaine Carter in appreciation for her work in carrying out the root beer project

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Articles and comments are welcomed.

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