Mazina'igan Supplement

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Iskigamizigan (Sugarbush)
A sequel to
Growing Up Ojibwe

Gathering maple sap. Sharon Nelis, Bad River tribal member, and helpers Austin Nelis and Rena LaGrew check the sap buckets at their sugarbush on the Bad River reservation. Of course, the helpers get a taste of the sweet sap. (Photo by Sue Erickson)

Boozhoo (hello)! My name is Tommy Sky. I am eleven years old and live on the Bad River reservation with my mom, dad and little sister. We are Ojibwe Indians. Some people call us the Chippewa. We call ourselves Anishinaabe (ah-nish-ih-nah-bay), meaning the original people.

I'm lucky because my mom and dad do a lot of things outdoors, like hunting, fishing, camping, and gathering. You probably do some of those things too. So, of course, I get to go along to learn and help. So does my little sister, Dawn. But she's only five and gets in the way a lot of times.

Photos by Dana Jackson

My sister and I both have Ojibwe names. Mine is Makoons, meaning "bear cub," and my sister's name is Biidaaban, meaning "dawn comes." We were given our names during a special ceremony. I try to learn new Ojibwe words every day. I will use a few as I talk to you. Not many people still speak Ojibwe today, so we are trying to learn and use Ojibwe as a family.

One of my favorite times of the year is in the early, early spring, just when that old Spirit of Winter is about to lose his grip on the Earth. In Ojibwe we call the Earth "Aki" (Ah-kih), and spring is called "ziigwan." This is the time when the sap starts to loosen and flow in the trunks of trees, and the ice that covers the rivers and lakes starts to melt, too.

When we begin to feel that warming in the air, my dad always says it's time to clean the sap buckets and take out the taps, because pretty soon we'll be needing them to collect ziinzibaakwadwaaboo—maple sap!

It's usually in late March, called onaabani-giizis (hard crust on the snow moon) in Ojibwe or early April, called iskigamiige-giizis (maple sugar moon). (The Ojibwe broke the year into moons. So we called months "moons." I bet the word month somehow comes from the word moon also.)

Maybe I like this time of year so much, because then I know spring is finally on its way, plus we get to go out in the woods to our sugar camp and begin to make maple syrup and sugar. That stuff is soooo good! Let me tell you how we make zhiiwaagamizigan (maple syrup) and ziiga'iganan (maple sugar cakes). It's a whole lot of work, but it's worth the time and trouble!

(Continued on page 4)

This is a sugar maple tree. My sister's friend, Shania whose Indian name is Mashikawizikwe (strong woman), shows where a tap will be placed.

If sap is flowing, it's time to tap the tree.

You need a hammer to pound the tap into the tree.

You need a drill to make a small hole in the bark.

You drill the hole until sap begins to flow.

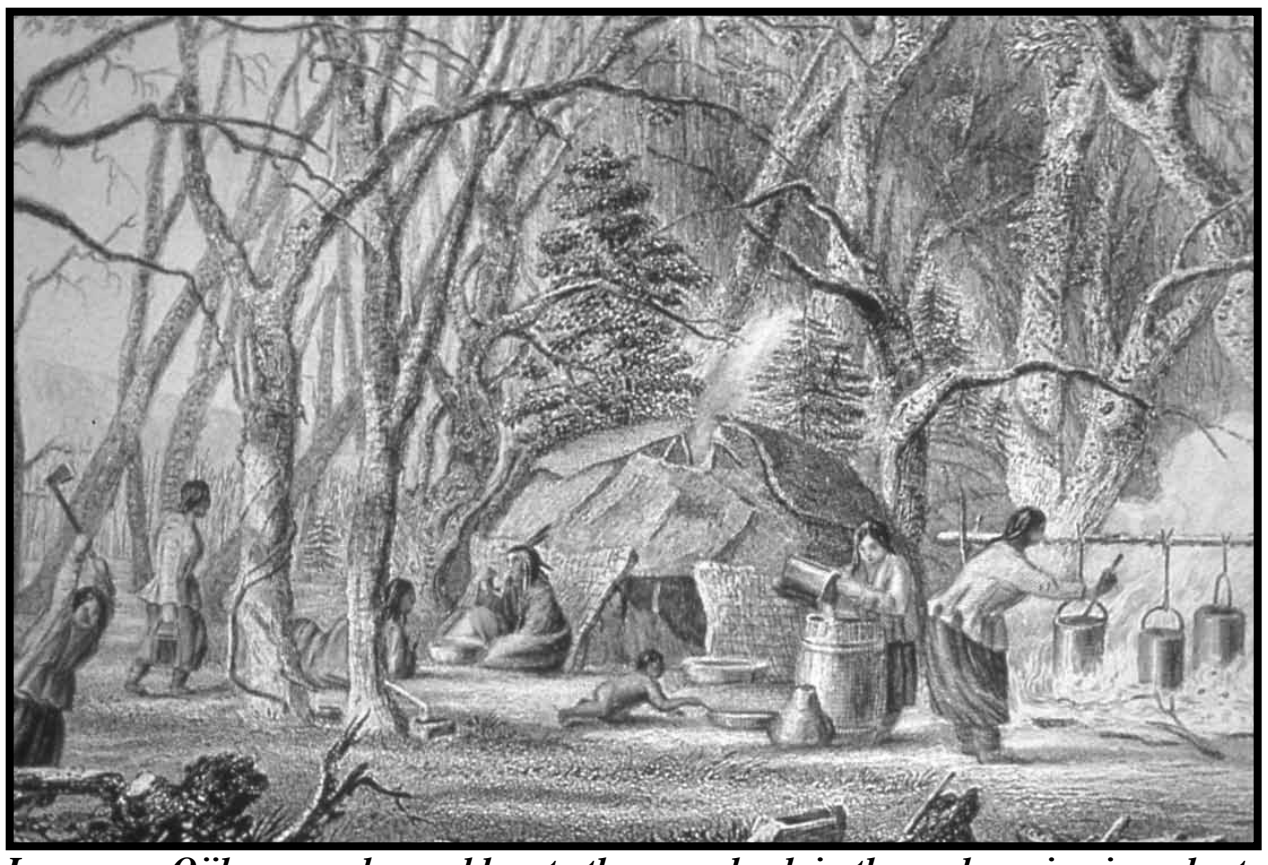
The sap tastes sweet already.

The tap is a small, hollow spout made from wood or metal.

Wendjidu Zinzibahkwud Real Sugar (Maple)

A story of old time sugar camp

Nodinens (Little Wind), Mille Lacs Band Ojibwe from central Minnesota, was 74 in 1910 or so when she told Frances Densmore about sugaring in the old days. Nodinens describes going to and building the winter hunting camp for six families. The wigwams would be insulated with evergreen boughs, dirt, and snow shoveled onto a framework of logs, covered with birch-bark and woven mats. The men would leave for deep woods, hunting and trapping. During the winter, women dried meat the men brought in. Then....



Long ago, Ojibwe people would go to the sugarbush in the early spring in order to make maple sugar, which they used to flavor many foods. They had sugar camps which they would return to each spring. (Photo courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society)

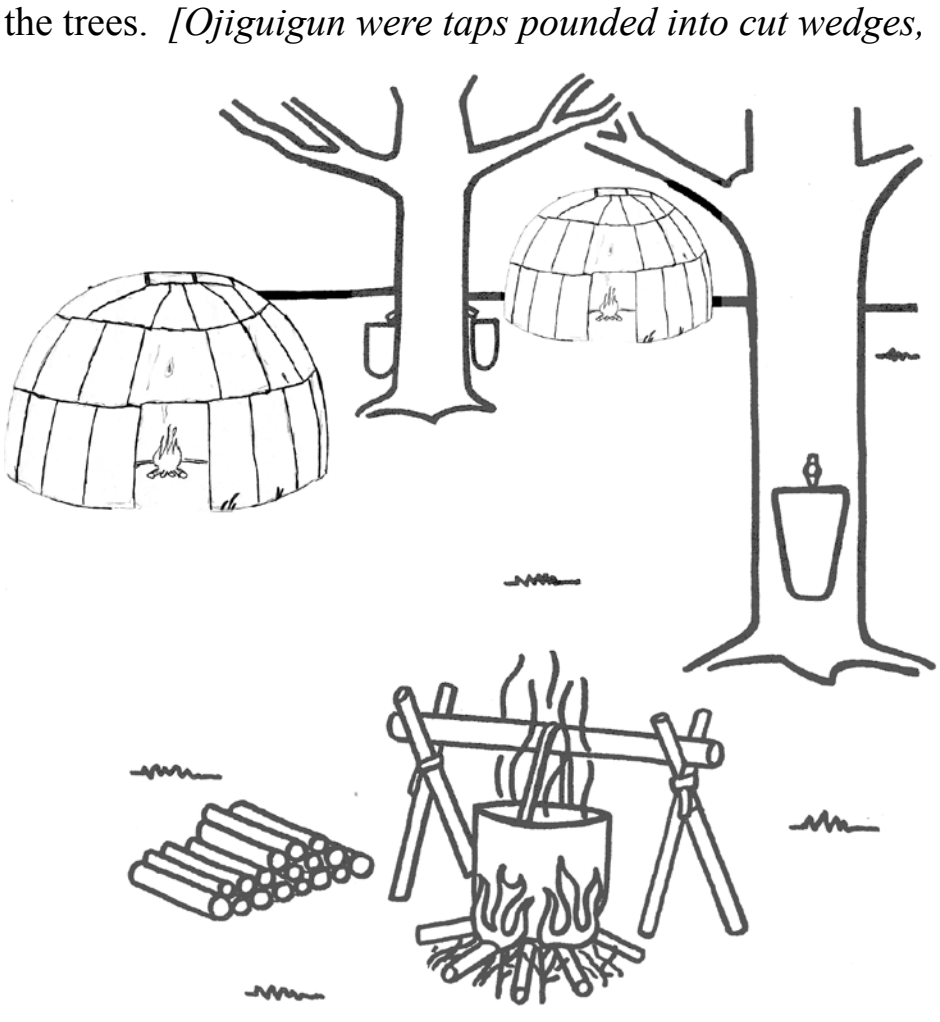
Toward the last of winter, my father would say, "One month after another has gone by. Spring is near. We must get back to our other work." So the women wrapped the dried meat tightly in tanned deerskins and the men packed their furs on sleds or toboggans. Once there was a fearful snowstorm when we were starting. My father quickly made snowshoes from branches for all the older people.

When we got to the sugar bush we took the birch-bark dishes out of storage and the women began tapping the trees. *[Ojiguigun were taps pounded into cut wedges, sealed around the spiles with hot pitch (or later drilled) about* 3" *deep, on the sunny side, about 3' above the roots. Negwakwun were spiles, made of large elderberry stems, with the pith pushed out, sharpened at one end, and notched to hold the sap pail.]* We had queer-shaped axes made of iron. *(Note: these may have been pickaxes, whose points would make more of a hole than a wedge-cut.)* Our sugar camp was always near Mille Lacs, and the men cut holes in the ice, put something over their heads and fished through the ice. There were plenty of big fish in those days; the men speared them. My father had some wire, and he made fishhooks and tied them on basswood cord. He got lots of pickerel that way.

A food cache was always near the sugar camp. We opened that, then had all kinds of nice food that we had stored in the fall. There were cedar-bark bags of rice, there were cranberries sewed in birch-bark makuks, (containers) and long strings of dried potatoes and apples. Grandmother had charge of all this. She made us young girls do the work. As soon as the little creeks opened, the boys caught lots of small fish. My sister and I carried them to the camp and dried them on a frame over the fire in the center of our camp.

My mother had two or three big brass kettles (akik)she had bought from an English trader and a few tin pails from an American trader. She used these in making the sugar. We had plenty of birch-bark dishes *(biskitena-*

(See A story of old time sugar camp, page 10)



Color this picture of an old time maple sugar camp.

(Continued from page 2)

Our sugarbush is on the Bad River reservation in Wisconsin. Sugarbush is called iskigamizigan in Ojibwe. My family has been using the same maple stand for a very long time. My dad says he can remember going out there when he was my age with his parents and grandma and grandpa, doing just about the same things we do today. Some people, like my friend, Joey, have sugar camps off the reservation, like in the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest.

My mom says that Ojibwe people have always collected maple sap. It was the Indians who taught white settlers how to tap sugar maple trees—one of many things they taught settlers coming to the "new" land so they could live. In the old days, the sap was made into granulated maple sugar and sugar cakes, because it was easier to store and carry than maple syrup. Back then the Ojibwe people used the maple sugar to flavor food like we do today. They used it with fruits, vegetables, cereals, fish, and meats and even mixed it with water for a good, cool drink. Have you every tasted *real* maple syrup or maple candy? If not, you should try some!!

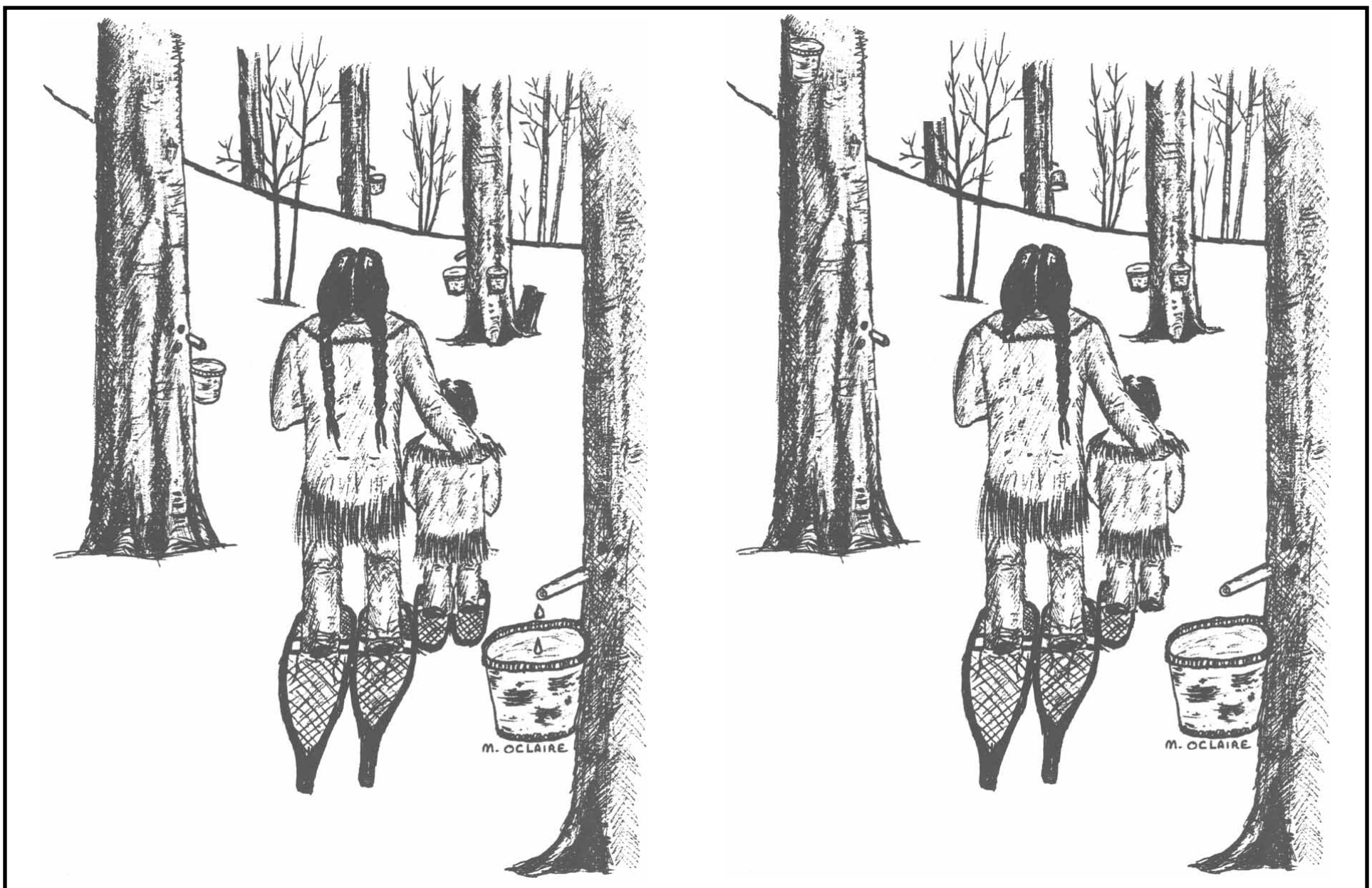
In the old days, Ojibwe people had sugar camps and would move to them in the early spring. They would leave a lodge there all year and return to it. They would also have a storehouse in which they kept many of the things needed to make maple sugar, like buckets, made of birch bark used to collect and carry sap.

Come along with me and I'll tell you how we still make maple sugar today. First of all, you must choose a place in the woods that has a lot of maple trees close together. There are different kinds of maple trees. You want good-sized *sugar* maple trees. You can tell a maple tree by its bark, and, of course, by its leaves if you are looking in the summer or fall. You want the trees fairly close together. That's called a stand. Having the trees close together is important because you have to go from tree to tree to put in taps and then later, carry buckets full of sap from the trees to your camp. So, if you don't want to walk for miles and miles, find a good stand of maples close together, like my great grandpa did years ago.

You will probably also want to have a pair of snowshoes—not necessary—but helpful when trying to move around the snow-covered forest. My family goes into our sugarbush on our ATVs, hauling a sled with buckets, drills, taps and stuff, but before we had ATVs, my dad said the family always walked from the road about a mile into our sugarbush, carrying pots and things we needed on a sled. If there is still a lot of snow, I bring my snowshoes because its easier walking around in the snow. You don't sink.

Before we start to tap our trees, we put down a little asemaa (tobacco) on the ground in respect to the trees we are about to use. We are thankful for the sugar maple trees and their gift to us. Mom and Dad say we should be thankful to anything in nature that we use, like when we hunt deer or even pick berries.

Can you find the differences in these two drawings?

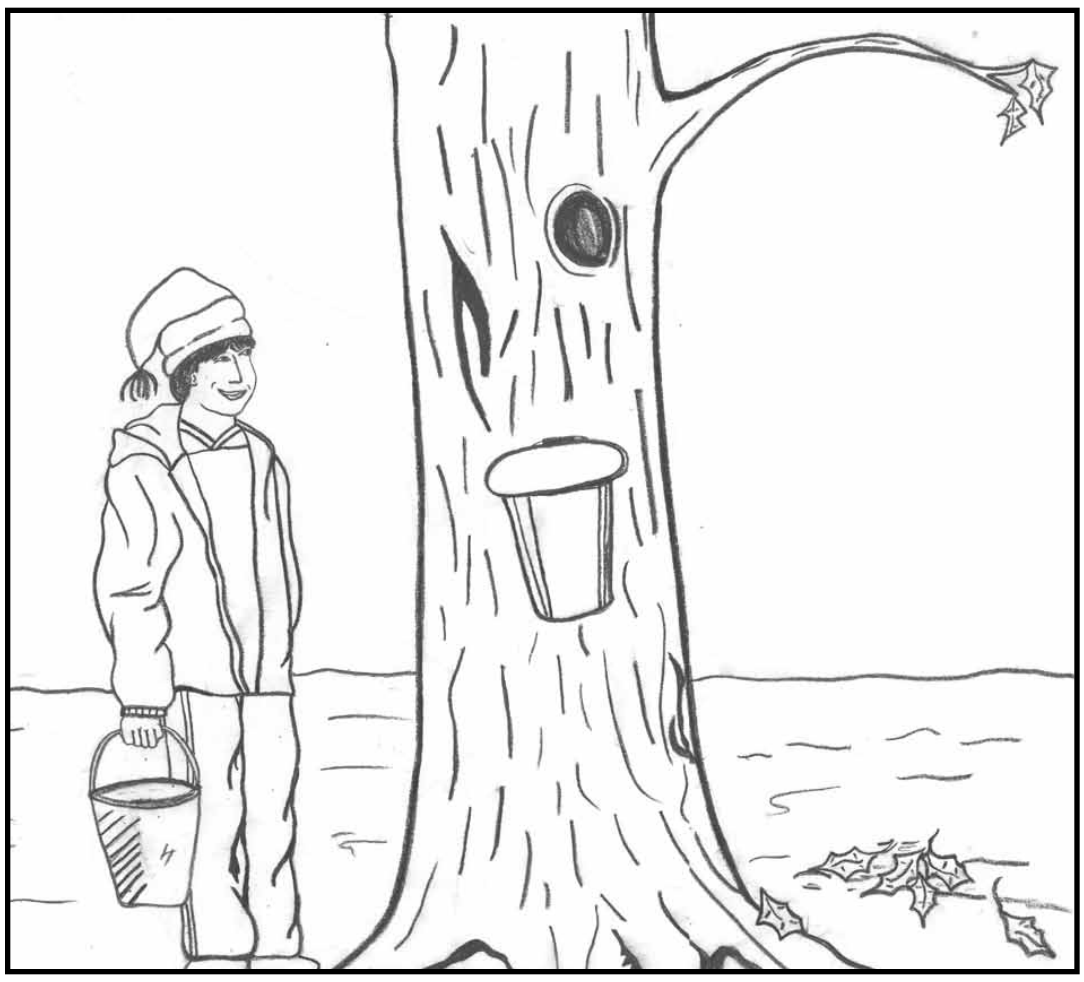


Can you find the ten differences between these two drawings by Matt O'Claire. Matt is also a member of the Bad River Band. Circle the differences on the drawing on the right.

At our sugarbush we tap about 40 trees, but we can put two or three taps into the bigger trees. So we have about 100 taps. The taps are like small wood or metal spouts that we carefully put into the tree trunk just beneath the bark. We have to make new holes each year, so it's good to bring a drill along. Once the tap is firmly in the tree, we hang a bucket below and the sap from the tree flows from the tap into our bucket. A long time ago, the taps were carved from wood and the buckets, called biskitenaagan, were made from birch bark. We use two-pound coffee cans or one gallon plastic milk jugs.

When we first start, the sap usually runs very slowly. But once it warms up, you have to check the buckets fairly often, like once or twice daily. Sometimes, the weather warms and the sap starts to flow, then it gets cold again, and the sap stops until the next thaw. So, you have to pay good attention to the weather.

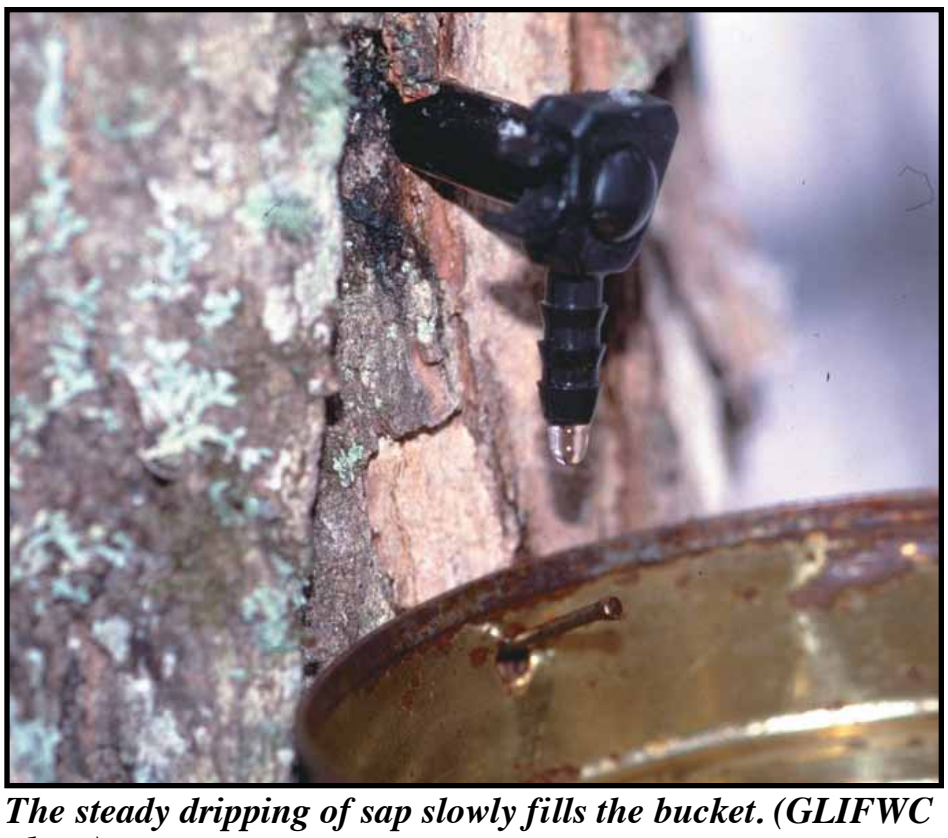
One thing that is really weird is that the sap runs up the tree. My dad told me the sap is stored in the roots of the tree through winter. In spring the sap runs up to the branches so that leaves can grow.



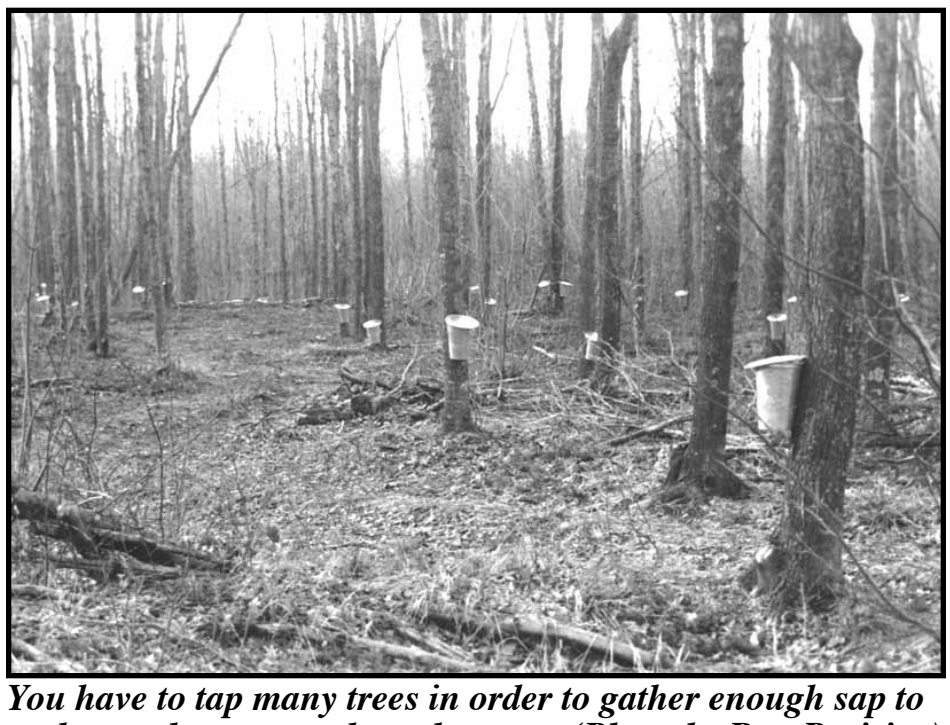
This is a drawing of me checking one of the trees in our sugarbush. ©Melissa Rasmussen

You can put more than one tap into large maple trees. (Photo by M.J. Kewley)

Some people use cans to collect the dripping sap, but you can also use milk jugs like the one above. (Photo by Amoose)



The steady dripping of sap slowly fills the bucket. (GLIFWC photo)



You have to tap many trees in order to gather enough sap to make maple syrup and maple sugar. (Photo by Ron Parisien)

There's other work to do at the campsite. We have a huge metal pot that needs to be cleaned. All the sap we bring from the trees is poured into the big pot that hangs above a wood fire. There's another job—gathering wood to keep a fire going for several days as we boil down the sap. "Makoons, put some more wood on the fire!" I hear that a lot during sugar time. We usually have it all stacked and ready to go before we start boiling down the sap, because then you will be busy enough.

The sap runs out of the tree trunk like light brown water at first. It's taste is slightly sweet early in the season. But later, it turns darker brown and tastes even more strongly of maple. Dad says there is more sugar in the sap later in the season. But we can't drink much of it because it is also used as a traditional medicine and we need all we can get to make syrup and maple sugar.

You have to collect lots of sap to get a little syrup and sugar, so we try not to waste any! It takes about 40 gallons of sap to make one gallon of syrup—that depends on how much sugar is in the sap. You could need more. So there's lots of sap to haul. Dad thinks you can get anywhere from five to fifteen gallons of sap from each tap—depending on things like how cold it is and the size of the tree.

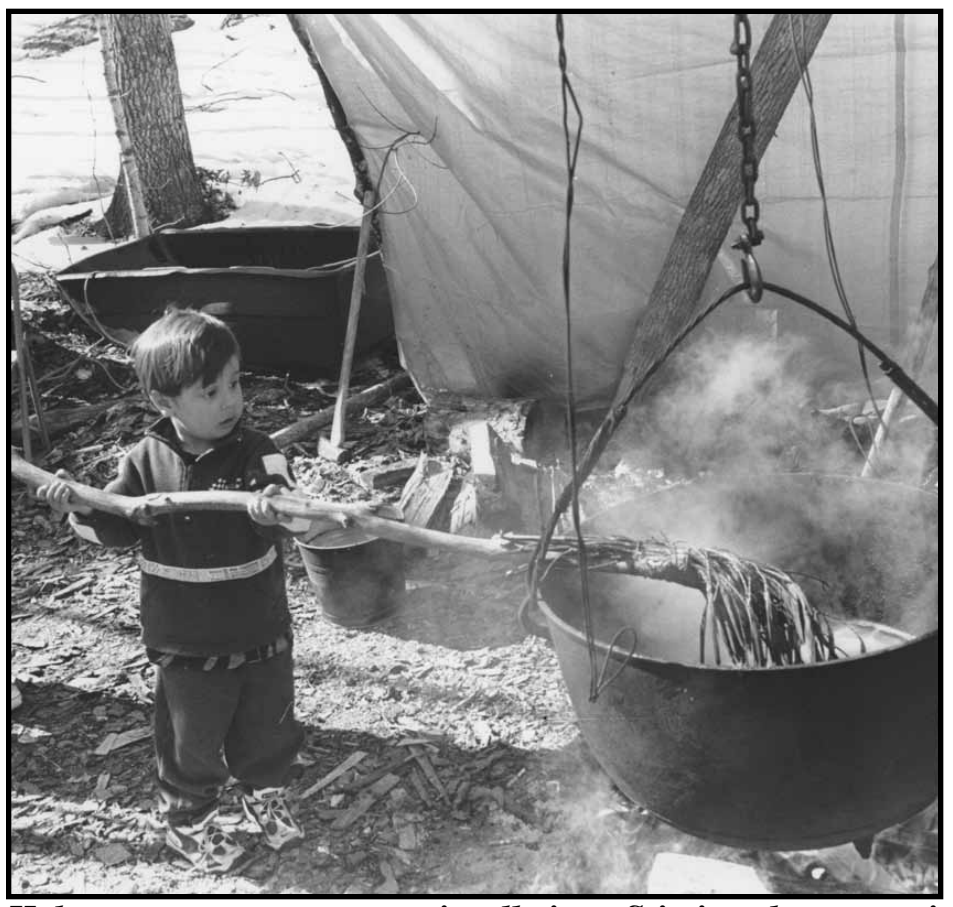
We take a large bucket and empty the sap from the small buckets on each of the trees into that one. When it is nearly full, or as much as we can carry, we bring it to the campsite, and it goes into the huge pot.

How many words can you make from Maple Syrup

Once you tap the trees, you have to keep checking the buckets and emptying them. Sharon Nelis and her young crew of sugarbush helpers peek inside the buckets. (Photo by Sue Erickson)

Ron Parisien, Bad River, empties fresh maple sap into a larger bucket in order to carry it back to his sugar camp. (Photo by Charlie Rasmussen)

Outside, over the fire a pot holds fresh maple sap ready to be boiled down into maple syrup or even sugar. You have to watch the pot and be ready to stir. (Photo by Karen Danielsen)



Help at sugar camp comes in all sizes. Stirring the sap as it boils over an open fire is Harold Knowlen, Mille Lacs Band member. (Photo by Amoose)

When the big pot is nearly full, we start to boil the sap down. This takes a steady fire and lots of watching and stirring. Mom and dad take turns watching the pot. If the sap starts to froth, you can brush it gently with cedar branches. The air smells sweet with maple as the white steam rises up out of the big vat. There's always a cloud of steam rising from our campsite at sugar time. Mom says all the boiling is done outside because it makes too much steam to do in the house. Besides, we would have to carry all the sap a long way back to our house. But if you are just boiling syrup into sugar, you can do that in the house because there is not so much steam, and you no longer need such big pot.

How many buckets can you find?

There are 25 buckets to collect ziinzibaakwadwaaboo. Can you find them all? The answer is on page 10. (Picture by Dennis Soulier, Bad River.)

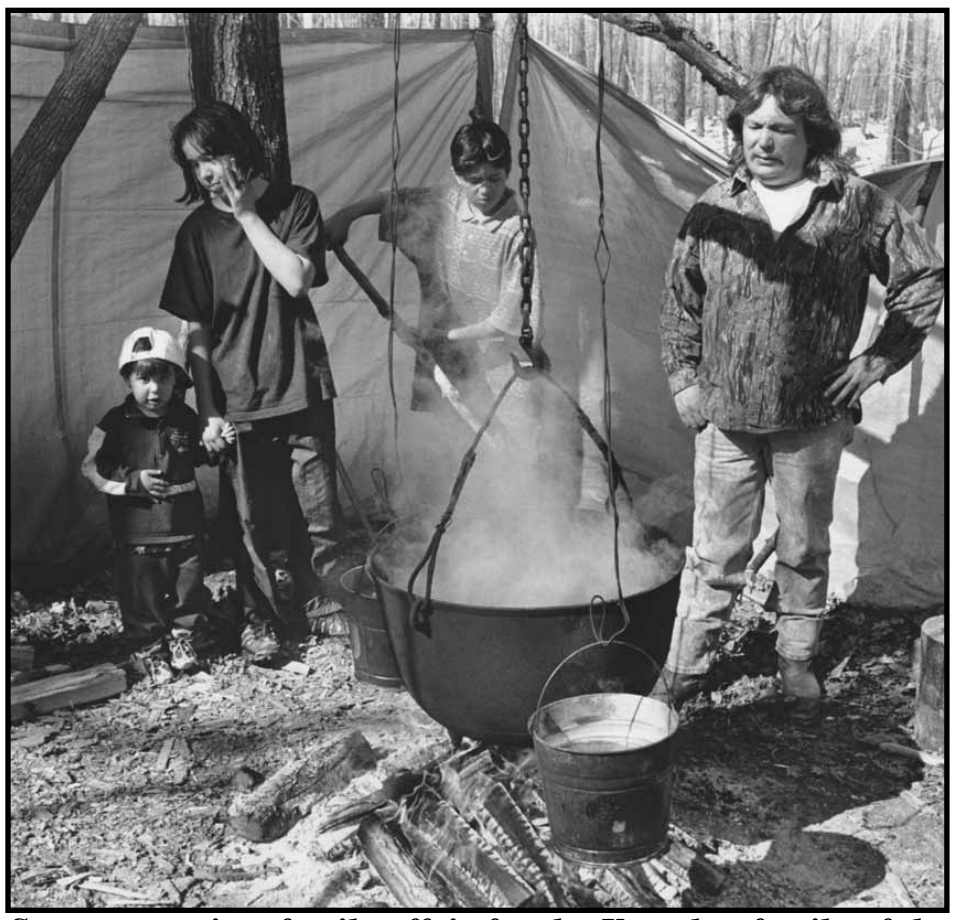
Making maple syrup is a family affair. Inside their sugar shack on the Bad River reservation, brothers Sam and Gene Maday pour sap into their boiling vat. They will boil it down into syrup. (Photo by Sharon Nelis)

Boiling down sap over an open fire requires careful watching. (Photo by Amoose)

I really have fun during sugar time because we usually get visitors at the camp who come and sit around the fire with us. They help with the stirring, tell stories and laugh and joke a lot. Mom always has a coffee pot going over the fire and a cooler full of sandwiches and snacks for everybody. Grandpa always comes to help, and my cousins come out every spring. We play hide-and-seek in the woods or we track waabooz, rabbit. We don't go too far from camp though, because makwa, bear, is just waking up from a winter's nap, and so is zhigaag, skunk. We don't want to meet either one of them! They say ma'iingan, wolf, also calls the Bad River reservation his home. So, it's best to be safe and stay close to camp.

Sugar camp usually lasts from two to five weeks, depending on the weather. Of course, we can't stay out there all the time. I have to go to school and can only help during the weekends. Both mom and dad have to work too, but dad usually tries to take a few days off to keep the sugar camp going. Sometimes we just check our sap buckets, empty them and store the sap until we have time to boil it down.

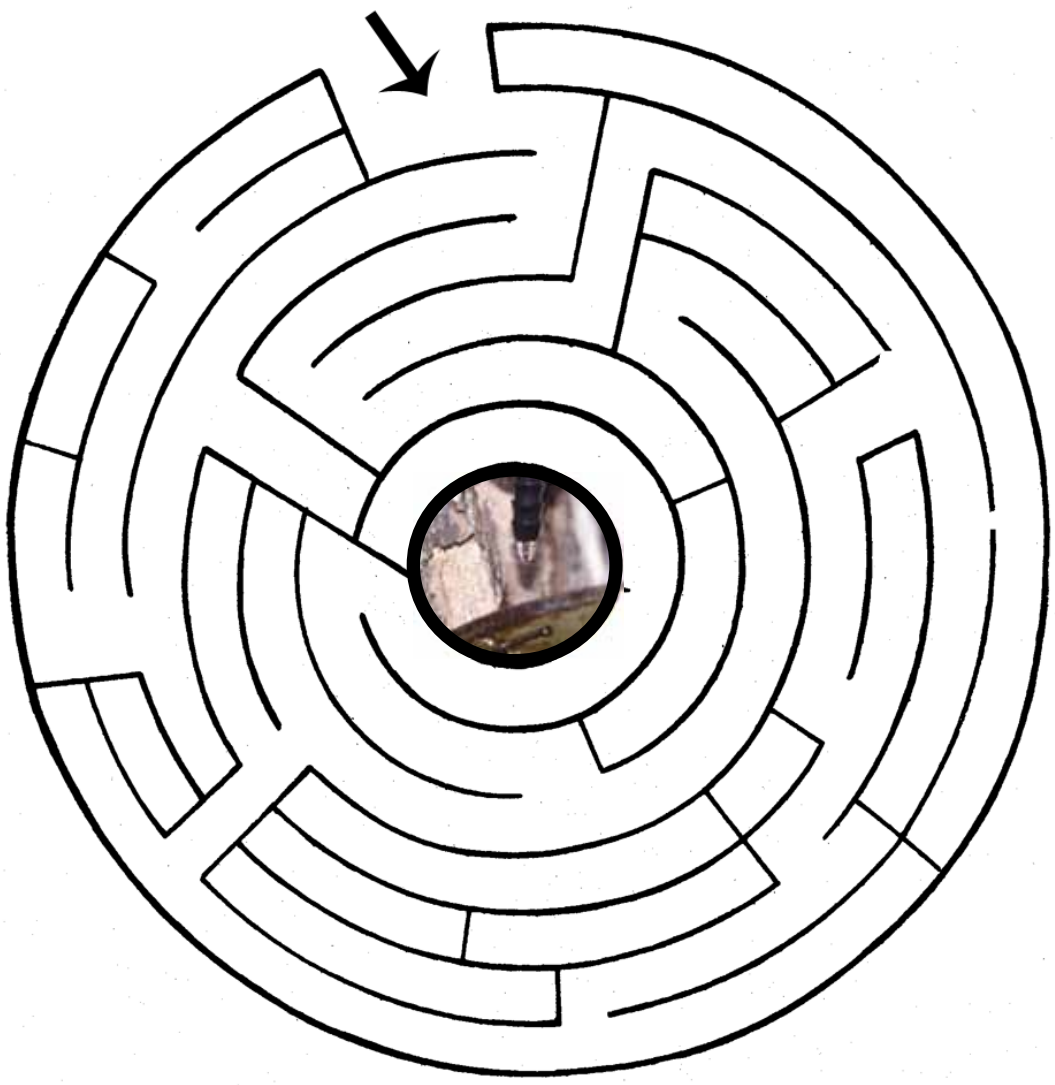
(My story continues on page 11)



Sugar camp is a family affair for the Knowlen family of the Mille Lacs Band. Everyone takes part in the work and fun. (Photo by Amoose)

Maze—

Tommy's cousin Niigani (meaning "one in front"), also known as Jake, and his family have come to help at the sugarbush. This is Niigani's first time visiting our sugarbush. Can you help him find his way to the sugarbush camp. *(Answer on page 10)*



Know your maple trees

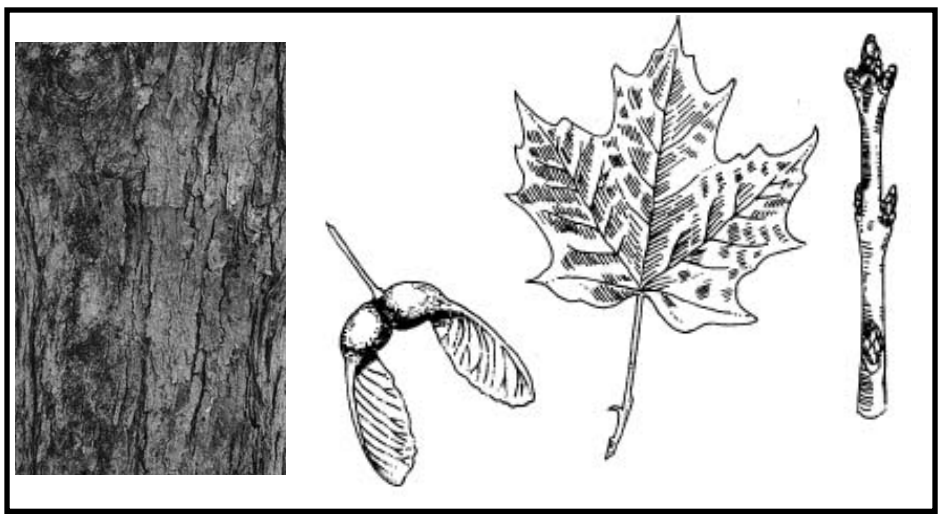
There are at least one hundred species of maple in the world. Fourteen of these are native to the United States. In Minnesota, the four species used for producing maple syrup are: sugar maple (hard maple); red maple (soft maple); silver maple (soft or cutleaf maple); and boxelder (Manitoba maple).

Most maple syrup is made from sugar maple sap. Sugar maple sap is preferred for making maple syrup because it has an average sugar content of two percent. Because sap from other maple species is usually lower in sugar content, approximately twice as much is needed to yield the same amount of finished syrup.

If processed carefully, the resulting syrup from any of the maples described will have good flavor. Ornamental maples, such as the Norway and Schwedler maple, have a milky sap and cannot be used for syrup production.

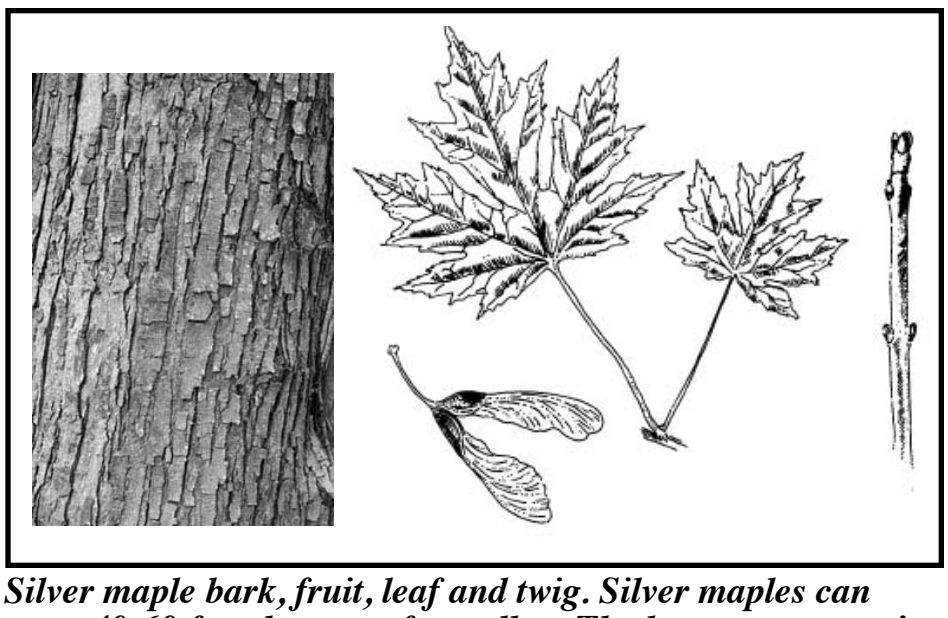
Maples are easy to identify because their leaves grow on opposite sides of the twig. During the active growing season, maples can be identified by their leaf shape. Following are descriptions of the four maples used for syrup production in Minnesota.

(Reprinted from University of Minnesota Extension Service, Minnesota Maple Series.)

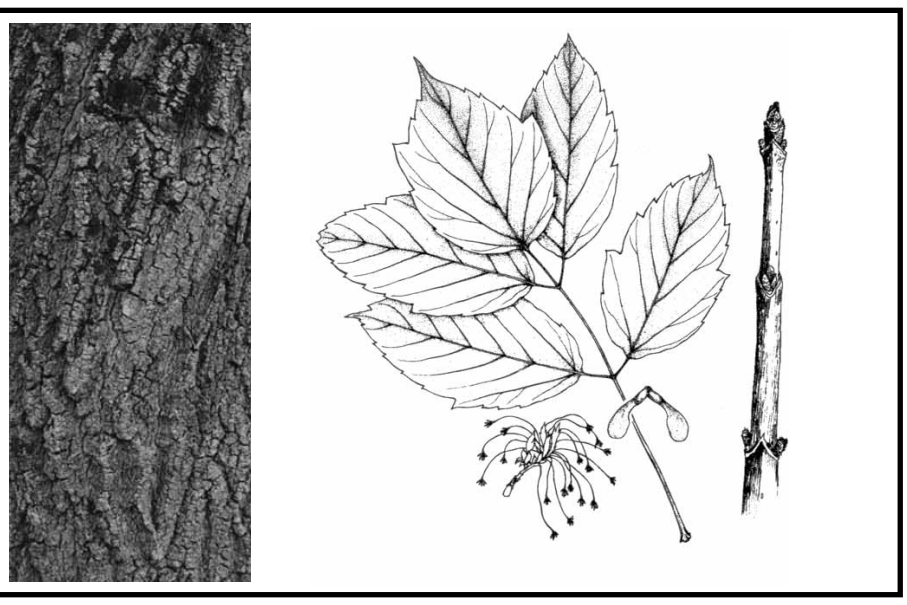


Sugar maple bark, fruit, leaf and twig. The sugar maple can grow to be 60 to 100 feet tall. The leaves are opposite, simple and three to five inches long, broad, and usually five-lobed. The sugar maple can be found in the northeast United States & southern Canada.

Red maple bark, fruit, leaf and twig. This maple can grow 40- 60 feet high, though it is sometimes larger. The leaves are simple, opposite and three to five lobed. The red maple is found in the eastern United States & southeast Canada.



Silver maple bark, fruit, leaf and twig. Silver maples can grow 40-60 feet, but are often taller. The leaves are opposite and simple with three to five lobes. The silver maple can be found in the eastern United States & southeast Canada.



Manitoba maple bark, fruit, leaves, and fruit. The Manitoba maple as it is called in Canada, is also known as ash-leaved maple or boxelder in the United States. The boxelder can grow from 60-80 feet high. The boxelder has a compound leaf, are opposite with three to nine coarsely-toothed leaflets. This maple can be found in the eastern & central United States & Canada.

Word scramble

Unscramble the following words associated with the different types of maple trees. (Answers on page 10)

rgsau _____

dxeblroe _____

vliesr _____

aplem _____

rde _____

pas _____

irftu _____

feal _____

rakb _____

psury _____

A story of old time sugar camp

(Continued from page 3)

gun, from biskite, she bends it, and onagun, a dish) but we children ate mostly from the large shells we got along the lake shore. We had sauce from the dried berries sweetened with the new maple sugar. The women gathered the inside bark from the cedar. This can only be scraped free in the spring. We got plenty of it for making mats and bags later.

Toward the end of the sugar season there was a great deal of thick sap called the "last run" *(izhwaga zinzibakwud)*. We also had lots of food we had dried. This provided us with food while we were making our gardens at our summer home.

Lots of sap and lots of work— all part of sugar camp

It takes about 30 – 40 gallons of average maple sap— (*zinzibakwudabo*, liquid sugar) to boil down to one gallon of syrup. No wonder the birch bark sap-collection pails were called *nadoban*, making the word for "she goes and gets" ***(nadobe)*** into an object for going and getting with! On the sunny side of a free-flowing tree, the small sap buckets might fill in an hour. Since there would be several taps in each of at least 900 trees (more like 2,000 trees for the 6 families Nodinens describes) everyone was kept busy running pails of sap to the boilers all day whenever it was sunny and the sap ran.

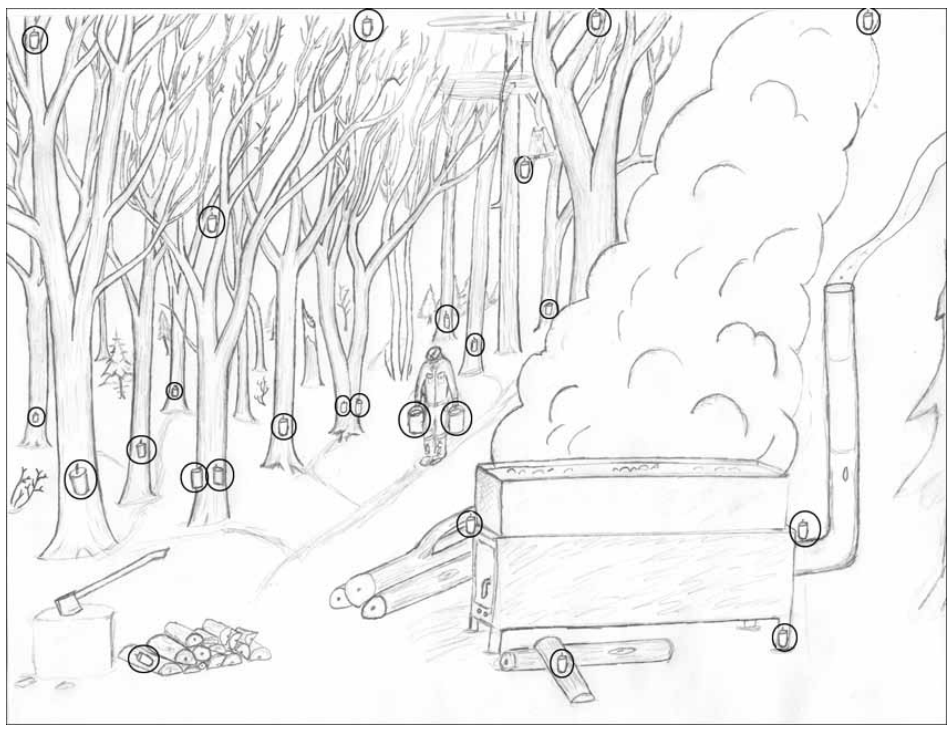
Forty gallons of sap reduces to about 3 quarts of sugar when further heated in a smaller kettle or pail *(ombigamizigan)*. Sugar was made in 2 forms. Thick syrup for hard sugar *(zhiiwaagamizigan)* was scooped before it granulated from the final boiling kettle, and poured onto ice or snow to solidify. Then it was packed tightly into shells or birchbark cones *(zhiishiigwaansag)* whose tops were sewn shut with basswood fiber for storage. These were licked and eaten like candy. Sugar cakes were also made in shapes of men and animals, moons, stars, flowers, poured into greased wooden molds.

Small pieces of deer tallow were put into the syrup as it boiled down. When the boiled sugar was about to granulate in its final boil-down, it was poured into a wooden sugaring trough, made from a smoothed-out log. It was stirred there to granulate it, and rubbed with sugar ladels and hands into sugar grains, ***ziinzibaakwad***. Warm sugar was poured from the trough into makuks of birchbark.

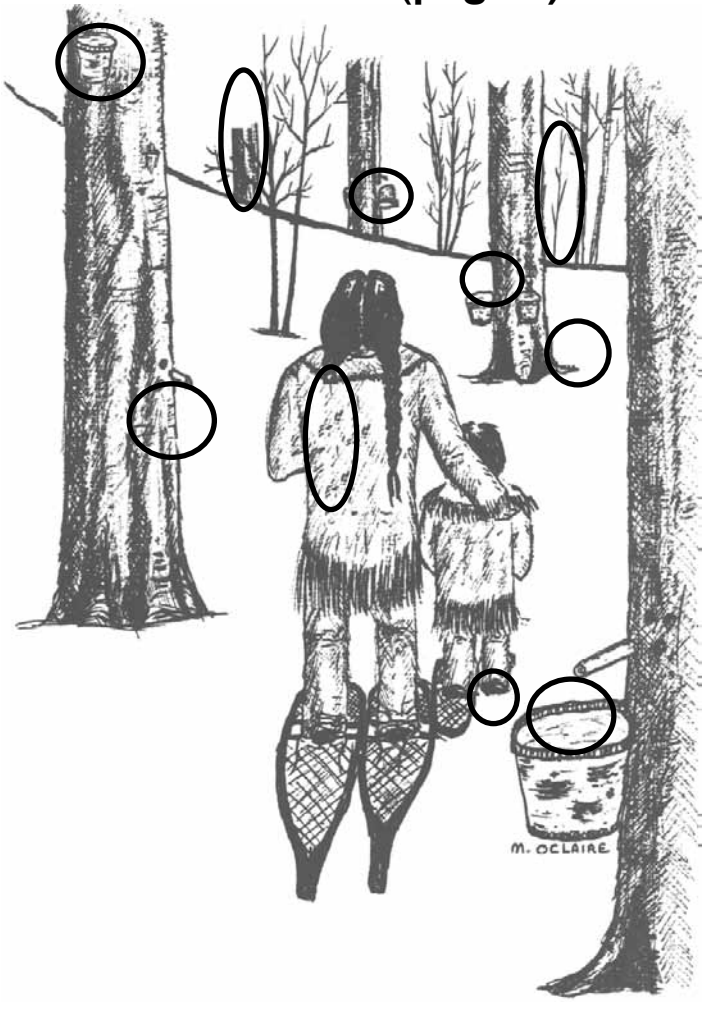
This was the basic seasoning and an important year-round food, eaten with grains, fish, fruits and vegetables, and with dried berries all year round. In summer, it was dissolved in water as a cooling drink. In winter it was stirred into with various root, leaf and bark teas. The fancy cakes were used as gifts, showing off the maker's originality of design.

(Excerpted from an account a www.kstrom.net/isk/food/maple.html)

How many buckets can you find? (page 7)



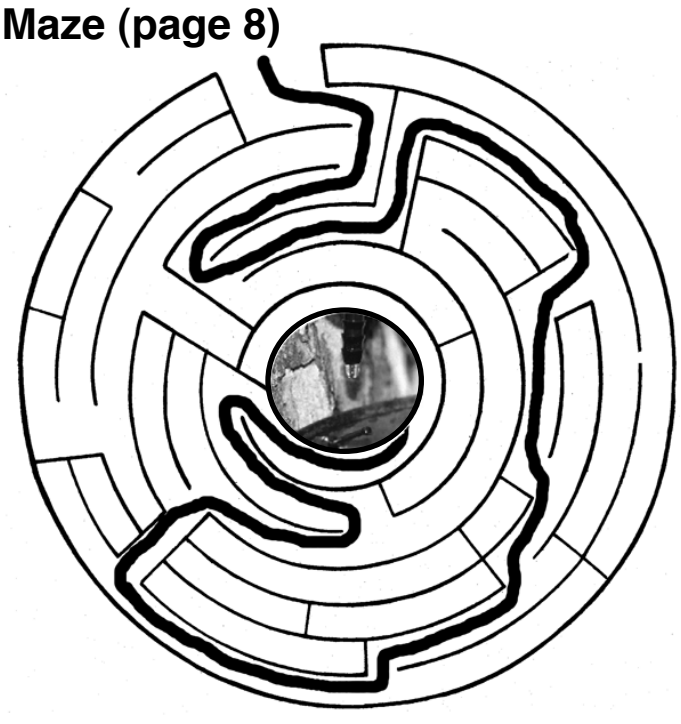
Find the difference (page 4)



Word scramble (page 9)

sugar
boxelder
silver
maple
red
sap
fruit
leaf
bark
syrup

Maze (page 8)



Now let's see what you learned (page 12)

1) sugar maple, 2) tap, 3) in late March, or early April, 4) boil it, 5) maple syrup, 6) 30-40 gallons, 7) maple syrup, 8) sap runs from the roots up to the top of the tree, 9) makoons, 10) bear cub

(Continued from page 8)

You know what's the very best part of sugaring? The sugar cakes! That's when mom takes the last of the syrup and keeps boiling it down into maple sugar. This takes a lot, and I mean a lot, of stirring! It gets so stiff, I can hardly stir it, and Dad and Mom take turns stirring as the syrup loses more water and finally turns into sugar. Mom puts the sugar into a pan. Once it cools and becomes hard, she cuts it into small squares to store as sugar cakes. She uses it in special foods during the year, although my sister and I get a piece of maple sugar candy every once in awhile.

Auntie Jean has some molds she puts the hot sugar into that look like little maple leaves. When the sugar cools, she takes it out of molds and the candy looks like leaves. She has them out as special treats at Christmas time. She says that in the old days, Ojibwe women used to carve wooden molds shaped like people, animals or even the stars.

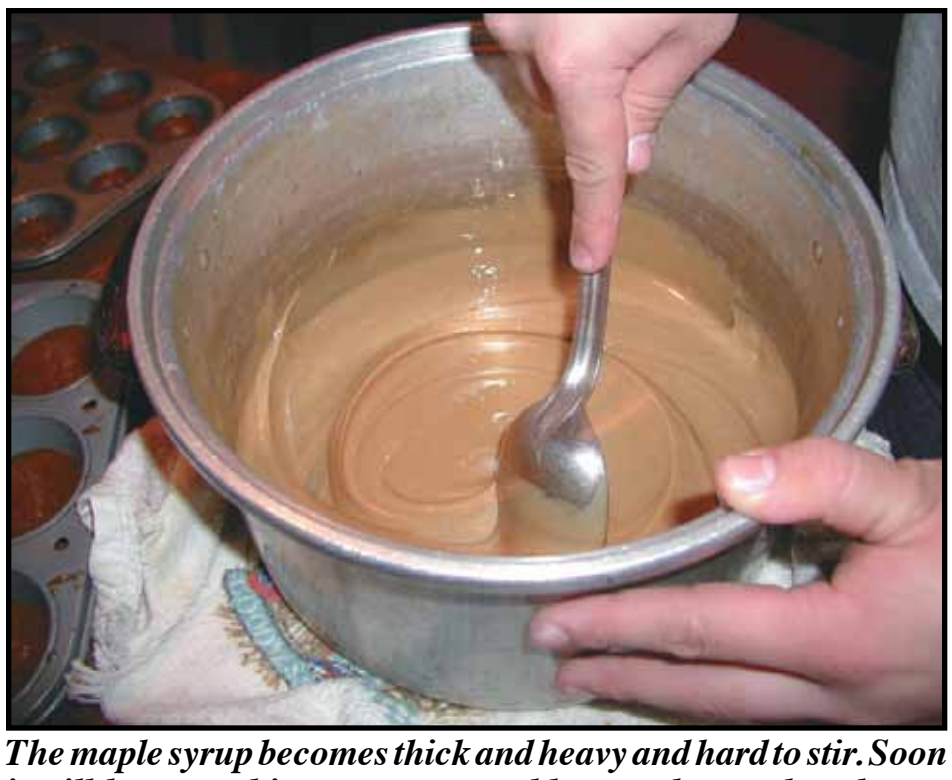
Mom stores the maple syrup in glass canning jars. She puts hot syrup into jars and then seals the jars tightly. That way we have syrup to use on our pancakes all year long. Grandma said that in the old days, the people would store maple sugar cakes in birch bark baskets that were kept cool in special underground storage places called caches (pronounced kash-ez).

We make maple syrup in the old way, pretty much. Some of our friends have fancy equipment now that makes it a lot easier. But, I enjoy the time that we spend in the sugarbush, and all the work is also fun.

Now you know all about sugar camp and how to make maple syrup and sugar. Maybe someday you will try it, too.

Turn the page to see what you have learned about maple sugaring. Good Luck!

If you want to make maple sugar or candy, you must cook the syrup even longer, until it gets very thick. It takes a lot of stirring and arm work. (Photo by Sam Maday)



The maple syrup becomes thick and heavy and hard to stir. Soon it will be poured into a pan or molds to make maple cakes or candy. (Photo by Sharon Nelis)

Ready to make sugar cakes, Sam Maday, Bad River, gives the thick, maple candy a few last stirs before pouring it into the muffin tins he uses for molds. (Photo by Sharon Nelis)

Finished maple sugar cakes are a tempting sweet treat. (Photo by Amoose)

Now let's see what you learned!!!

I hope you have enjoyed reading my story about maple sugaring. Let's see if you can answer some questions. (Answers are on page 10)

1) What kind of maple tree do we get most maple sap from? _____

2) What is put into the bark of the tree to collect sap?

_____

3) When do we collect maple sap? _____

_____

4) What do you have to do to the sap before you get maple syrup and sugar? _____

5) What does the Ojibwe word zhiiwaagamizigan mean?

_____

6) How many gallons of sap make a gallon of syrup?

_____

7) Which do you have first, maple syrup or sugar?

_____

8) Which way does the tree sap flow in the spring?

_____

9) What is my Indian name?

_____

10) What does my Indian name mean?

_____

Connect the dots to reveal makwa.
Do you remember what this word means?

Maple Recipes

Make sure to get your parent's permission before using the blender or the stove.

Maple Milkshake

1 cup milk
3 tsp. maple syrup
small scoop of ice cream

Place all ingredients in blender and blend until well mixed, or shake all ingredients well and serve. Makes one serving.

No-Bake Maple Cookies

2 cups maple sugar
1/2 cup milk
1/2 cup shortening
1/2 tsp. salt
1 tsp. vanilla
3 cups quick oats
6 tblsp. peanut butter

Bring the maple sugar, milk, shortening, salt and vanilla to full rolling boil, stirring constantly. Remove from heat. Stir in oats and peanut butter. Drop on waxed paper by spoonfuls. Let set about 1 hour or until firm.

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