

DIY Maple Tree Tapping Guide



Picking Up Your Equipment

Each participant will be loaned two to three white food safe 4-5 gallon buckets with tops, a metal pail to hang on the tree, a lid and a spile (the name of the tap that goes into the tree) All white buckets will have the name of the participant written on the tape (top and container side) and the sap pails are numbered for ease of location once pail is hanging in the woods.

You will need your own portable drill with a wood bit that is 7/16 inch diameter that will hold the spile once it is pounded into the tree. With the fluctuation of temperatures, freezing at night and in the 40s during the day, the sap starts rising. You will also need a hammer and a small piece of flat sided wood to rest on the end of the spile to protect it from the hammer blows so it is not bent or broken. Remember these trees are living things so make sure you have chosen where to drill carefully so there is only one hole or the tree will be too stressed. Be patient as some trees are slow to start running.



After Picking Up Your Equipment

Arrive at the Big Woods park on the left side of the driveway at the Retreat (1221 Wayzata Blvd.) where there are 6 parking spaces for Big Woods visitors. The area to the west, or straight ahead towards Colonial Square is usually the area where the trees are tapped but if you would like to climb the hill to the right, there are good trees there also. There is also a path beyond the rock that has some great Maple trees.

Picking Out a Tree

- Look for a Maple tree that must measure 12 inches across (diameter) or larger
- The bark is gray and has narrow furrows and the ridges are somewhat irregular.
- Some may still have a few leaves left on the tree or if you look on the ground under the tree you will find Maple leaves. This is the same leaf displayed on the Canadian flag.
- A sure sign is that the tree has been tapped in the past: Look on the south side for an area that looks like it has been plugged-about 4.5 feet up from the ground or a large root. Do not tap either above or below this disturbed area because the plug has stopped the sap from rising through the heartwood in that area of the tree.



Tapping Your Tree

Once your tree is chosen, drill a hole for your spile (or tap) at a slight angle 4.5 inches up from the ground into the heartwood of the tree 2 inches. Remember, you want to have your spile securely placed into the tree so when the metal pail fills it doesn't pull the spile out and you loose all the sap. Remember to clean the wood pulp out of the drilled hole so it doesn't clog the flow of the sap into your pail. Add the cover with the wire and check back the next day to see if you have a tree that is producing enough to share. This will give you an idea of how often to check your pail. The warmer the sun and temp, the faster the sap rises. Don't worry if leaves or bugs get into the sap pail as the boiling is quite robust and removes all impurities.



Congratulations!

You've tapped your tree, hung your pail and now it will be collection of sap in the following days. Check your tree at your convenience. Once the metal pail is full pour the sap in to the white bucket, cover it tightly and delivered it to the area where you picked up your equipment. If not full enough keep the sap in your white buckets cold so it doesn't spoil. Pop it into a snow bank or keep it in your cold garage or on the north side of your house. If you need more than 2 large white buckets, let us know. Please remember you will need to clean these at the end of the season.

Once you have 4 gallons in your white bucket, bring it down to the area where you picked up your supplies. Once there are 30-40 gallons we will start reducing or evaporating the sap to syrup. If you are a "seasoned sapper" and would like to schedule a day to feed the wood stove and add sap to the pan, let us know.



Getting Syrup

Mark your jars with your name and deliver them to the area where equipment was picked up. Please deliver your glass jars the first week. Sometimes there are three or four batches for finished syrup, it all depend on the season. The reason we mark all white buckets is to tell how many gallons sap a family brings in to be reduced. They will receive finished syrup depending on their quantity but everyone will take home syrup for their effort.



Removing the Equipment & Cleaning Up

Bring your hammer with you.

When the leaves start emerging on the tips of the tree branches or the sap is cloudy the season is over. Gently remove your tree spile by tapping lightly on each side to loosen it. Pull it out, toss in your metal pail and pick up a 2 inch thick stick and pound it into the hole so the tree doesn't keep weeping as much.

Once the season comes to the end, you are responsible for cleaning out your buckets and pails with mild soap and water, drying them so they don't stick together when stacked for storage and returning them to the location where you picked them up. Please be as timely as possible as when equipment is returned a month or two later, it is difficult reorganize the storage area.

Remember, this is a FREE activity, sponsored by the City of Wayzata's Parks and Trails Board and provided by volunteers, not paid staff. Please be respectful of volunteer time and plan to clean up your supplies after. :)