

History of Maple Syrup to the Anishinaabeg ³

For centuries, maple trees were tapped for their sweet sap by the native woodland peoples. Collecting maple syrup is such an important time of year for the Anishinaabe that they call the month of April the Sugar Bush Moon, or Ziisabaakdake Giizis.

Anishinaabe bands would break into smaller groups of families during early springtime, when temperatures were right; freezing at night with warm days for the sap to run. These families created temporary camps called 'the sugar bush' which became home for a few weeks to a few months while the sap was collected, processed and stored as maple sugar. The sap was boiled until it crystallized into sugar. The thick layer of crystallized sugar was cut into cakes (called sugar cakes) and was given to children, as treats or brought along on journeys, as a source of energy. Sugar cakes are still a popular treat!

The sugar was then used for trading and for adding to the diet of wild rice, corn, fish, venison, bear, and other foods. Maple sugar, and now maple syrup, is a main seasoning ingredient for the Anishinaabe people.

Ziinzibaakwad (Maple Sugar) is still an important part of the Anishinaabe culture today. With the increased consumption of high fructose corn syrup and white refined sugars, rates of diabetes and obesity have also increased. Ziinzibaakwad in small quantities provides an all-natural sweetener. Even natural sweeteners will raise glucose levels for those who are living with diabetes, but small amounts can still be fit into meals. (Photo Credit 29, Anishinaabe Ancestors Harvesting Maple Sap)



The Gift of Maple Syrup ³

One day, Nanaboozho went walking around. "I think I'll go see how my friends the Anishinaabe are doing," he said. So, he went to a village of Indian people. But there was no one around. So, Nanaboozho looked for the people. They were not fishing in the streams or the lake. They were not working in the fields hoeing their crops. They were not gathering berries. Finally, he found them. They were in the grove of maple trees near the village. They were just lying on their backs with their mouths open, letting maple syrup drip into their mouths. "This will NOT do!" Nanaboozho said. "My people are all going to be unhealthy if they keep on living this way."

The Gift of Maple Syrup ³ (Continued)

So, Nanaboozho went down to the river. He took with him a big basket he had made of birch bark. With this basket, he brought back many buckets of water. He went to the top of the maple trees and poured water in, so that it thinned out the syrup. Now, thick maple syrup no longer dripped out of the broken twigs. Now what came out was thin and watery and just barely sweet to the taste. "This is how it will be from now on," Nanaboozho said. "No longer will syrup drip from the maple trees. Now

there will only be this watery sap. When people want to make maple syrup, they will have to gather many buckets full of the sap in a birch bark basket like mine. They will have to gather wood and make fires so they can heat stones to drop into the baskets. They will have to boil the water with the heated stones for a long time to make even a little maple syrup. Then my people will no longer grow unhealthy. Then they will appreciate this maple syrup Gitchee Manitou made available to them. Not only that, this sap will drip only from the trees at a certain time of the year. Then it will not keep people from hunting and fishing and gathering and hoeing in the fields. This is how it is going to be," Nanaboozho said. And, that is how it is to this day. (Photo Credit 29, Anishinaabe Ancestors Harvesting Maple Sap)