

Maple Syrup Report 2019 by Carl and Joan Obecnny

Please note that these entries have been listed in reverse order by date.

Wednesday evening March 27

It just goes to show you, you never know what surprises are in store with you each sugar season. Whereas a few days ago, we thought we would fall short of our seasonal average by roughly 25%. However, with the excellent sapping conditions over the last few days and taking the time to clean the equipment we're back making medium grade maple syrup and, in addition, we expect we'll reach our seasonal average of about 35 gallons with 175 taps.

Considering the recent excellent sap flows (both clarity and volume) we decided to not to remove the bags/spiles yesterday extending the season for one additional day today. So, with the afternoon gather today, we'll remove the 135 bags and spiles. Remember, Judy and I took down and removed 40 buckets and spiles on Tuesday. We cleaned the 40 buckets yesterday with hot water and bleach while we boiled to get a bit of a head start on the clean-up tasks.

Yesterday while Joan tended the evaporator (once fired up it can't be left) with the help of Maureen (the "Machine"), Kevin, Judy (the faithful regular), Afrika and Heidi (the supervisors) we gathered another 80 gallons of clear as water sap. By the time we had boiled off that 80 gallons along with the 165 gathered the evening before we added another 5 gallons of delicious medium grade syrup to our total to date. A ratio of roughly 50 gallons of sap to one gallon of syrup. We are tired, but, as the old times say and my buddy, Jim always says, "make hay (syrup) while the Sun shines (sap flows)"!

With the anticipated warm temperatures we will definitely take down the remaining 140 bags and spiles with the final gather this afternoon. The sap ran into the night last night and we expect another decent run today. So, our plan is to gather as late in the day as possible, say around 5-5:30 pm to get every last drop of 2019 sap and have enough daylight to remove the spiles.

Tuesday evening March 26

As expected, the sap didn't start to run until the afternoon, however, it ran far, far harder than expected. So, with the help of the super, duper hard working Judy, along with Heidi and Afrika, we ended up gathering 165 gallons of nice clear sap. As a result of the cold temperatures last night, the trees "reset" and even the buckets that had yellow colored sap in them yesterday were clear today.

Judy, the hounds and I initially headed out with the sole intention of just emptying and taking down the buckets and removing the corresponding spiles. We were concerned that the sap would freeze solid tonight and damage the buckets. However, once we had accomplished that task, in order to avoid having large chunks of ice in the bags tomorrow (temperatures expected in the low teens tonight), we forged ahead and emptied all the bags. Judy sure earned herself an extra bottle of syrup this evening! Depending on whether the sap runs tomorrow, we'll either simply head out and collect the bags and remove the corresponding spiles or have one additional gather and then remove the spiles and collect the bags. Either way, our sap gathering days will end tomorrow!

Lastly, in an effort to maintain the quality of the syrup, tomorrow morning I'll drain and clean the evaporator once again (replacing the sap/syrup) before we fire up to boil for the final time this year.

Monday March 25

We thought on Sunday evening it would be a banner day on Monday and it was! With the help of Judy, Melissa, Brian, Joan, Afrika and Heidi we gathered just over 350 gallons of sap. However, as we gathered, the signals heralding the end of the season presented themselves. We discovered the sap from 3-4 trees had turned yellow and had to be discarded. Other signals include the blackberry bushes have started budding out and, as I look out my window, I can see the soft maple just below the house which gets sunlight most of the day budding out as well.

The soft maples bud out just prior to the hard maples. So, the next gather will be the final gather of the year. We'll take the spiles out of the trees as we gather and collect the bags and buckets as we go. When gathering we'll also bring along an extra 5 gallon pail and before combining the sap with what we'll keep and boil we'll first pour the sap from each bag and bucket into the extra pail to determine the color. Any yellow sap will be discarded. After boiling the final sap in the evaporator, we'll drain the evaporator and boil that material down to a thick dark syrup in a large pot outside on a propane stove. Without sap to "back up" the sap being boiled we can't continue using the evaporator as we would burn the pans.

Special note, yes Robert, you can expect the lion's share of the thick really dark stuff we'll make in the pot to flavor and sweeten your morning coffee.

Goodness, it was a very late night last night as we boiled the roughly 350 gallons of sap we gathered well into the morning hours eventually making just over 7 gallons of delicious medium to dark grade maple syrup. By the end of the season, I expect we will have made in the neighborhood of 25 gallons of syrup. Less than usual, but, still plenty for our use throughout the year and to give away.

While it's a gorgeous sunny day, it was a cold night (teens) and the forecast calls for a couple more cold nights before we start to warm up. So, as we've seen a number of times this year, we may get afternoon sap runs after the trees have the opportunity to warm up making it difficult to determine when the next and final gather will take place. If you plan on participating, stay tuned. I'm hoping we'll get to the final gather and removal of the spiles tomorrow afternoon or at the latest Thursday afternoon. Then, the clean-up begins. It usually takes about two days to get everything cleaned and stored away for next year.

Sunday evening March 24

Holy smokes, the trees have really let loose and the sap is running like crazy!

We plan on heading out to gather between 9:30 and 10 am tomorrow morning. I think we'll have a good number of full bags and buckets and wouldn't be surprised if a few are overflowing.

We'll be back boiling the sap down to what we hope will continue to be really nice dark maple syrup tomorrow afternoon!

Sunday afternoon March 24

Heidi and I just came in from checking the bags and buckets. As a result of the cold night last night, it's only just within the last hour or so when most of the spiles have started dripping at a good pace. So, we've decided to wait until tomorrow to gather when more sap will be in the bags and buckets. In addition, a little ice remains in many of the bags and buckets which will keep the sap cold. We did have to move sap from a few bags that were almost full and pour it into buckets that had far less.

We expect the sap will run into the night as the temperature is not forecast to get below freezing until the early morning tomorrow and then, only into the high 20's. So, we won't need to be concerned about the buckets or bags for that

matter freezing solid. Ice in the bags simply impacts our ability to gather the sap, however, if the sap in the buckets freeze solid, the seams can break ruining the bucket.

We anticipate there will be a decent amount of sap to gather tomorrow once what little ice accumulates overnight has had a chance to thaw. If I were to guess, I'd say we'll be gathering in the early afternoon and start boiling thereafter. If you're thinking you might wish to participate in the gather, stay tuned for the update tomorrow for the time.

Many thanks to Brent and Sol for splitting and stacking wood in the woodshed today so we'll have plenty on hand to fire the evaporator in the coming week.

Saturday evening March 23

It was a magnificent day here in the Catskill Mountains and it's a beautiful clear starry night as well! It was too cold for the sap to run other than just a little at the very end of the day. So, no sap gathering today. A welcome rest day!

With the help of our weekend guests as well as the welcome company of several visiting observers, we boiled the 175 gallons of sap we had on hand making 4.6 gallons of dark, but, super tasty syrup.

With the forecasted warmer temperatures for tomorrow and wind out of the West, we anticipate we'll be gathering sap towards the end of the day and, if so, we will send an update tomorrow with the time for those who'd like to participate. After an early morning pancake and waffle breakfast with fresh maple syrup, we'll put our weekend guests to good use tomorrow moving and splitting wood to replenish our pile for use in the evaporator.

Just a note, the blackberries bushes are starting to bud out, so, our remaining sugaring days may be limited. Once the maple trees start to bud out the sap will turn yellow and can no longer be used to make syrup.

Lastly, I was pleased to hear today that others in the Valley are making maple syrup this year. I look forward to an exchange of our respective syrups.

Saturday morning March 23

The snow yesterday set us back a bit, so, we didn't get to boil off the 175 gallons of sap we have on hand. However, we did drain and clean the evaporator. It was dirty---i.e. filled with "sugar sand."

We'll fire up the evaporator this morning and start boiling and with running new sap thru we're hopeful we'll return to a "medium" grade syrup.

I don't think the sap will run today, but, tomorrow looks like it's shaping up to be another banner day with warmer temperatures and the wind out of the West. As the "old-timers" say, "The wind out of the West is best for the sap to run".

Friday morning March 22

Andrew, here's the spring winter storm you thought we might avoid this year. We have 6-8 inches (8 inches on colder surfaces) of heavy wet snow and it's still snowing! Lovely, but, this will make the maple syrup season a bit more difficult. We've already lost one White Birch in the yard due to the heavy snow and, I think, there's a good chance we'll lose power at some point today.

Time to put the chains and plow back on the jeep!

Thursday evening March 21

As expected, it was a banner day. By the end of the day, Joan, Judy and I had gathered about 500 gallons of sap in the wet snow, sleet and cold rain---a great day! With the help of Dave Hoag, Sr. we boiled all but about 175 gallons which

remain in the large gathering tank on the trailer outside to keep cold. I was simply too tired to keep boiling this evening, but, we made about 6 gallons of tasty dark maple syrup today. The maple syrup grading is as follows: Light, Medium, Dark A and Dark B. We made mostly Dark A as well as some Dark B today. We know many of you prefer the dark syrup as it has a more robust maple flavor.

We believe we went directly from making Light syrup to Dark because of the unusually warm weather we experienced earlier in the week. The sap we gathered today while still clear, was just a bit cloudy. Once the sap starts to turn yellow, that will herald the end of the sugar season.

Tomorrow we'll drain the contents of the evaporator thru a filter into 5 gallon buckets, clean the evaporator and then replace the contents back into the evaporator and start boiling the 175 gallons of sap still in the gathering tank. With the return of colder temperatures, going forward, our hope is to return to a Medium grade syrup. Only time will tell. Even if the syrup remains Dark, we continue so long as the flavor remains decent.

Thursday morning March 21

The trees/sap ran much of the night and we have many bags and buckets ½ to almost full So. We'll pump up as much of the sap as we can from the large (225 gallon) gathering tank into the two sixty gallon feeder tanks and fire up the evaporator as soon as I finish this email and start boiling.

We plan on heading out to gather at around 10-10:30 am. We may not have enough room in the 225 gallon tank for all the sap and may need to leave some in the tank in the woods. A busy sap/syrup day ahead.

Wednesday evening March 20

It was a wonderful one both weather-wise with plenty of sunshine and blue skies and sap wise. We have 225 gallons of sap ready to be boiled, but, we've decided to wait to fire up the evaporator until early tomorrow morning. The trees really let loose today and the spiles are still running hard as I type. In fact, by the time we finished with the gather today, the bags where we started already had accumulated 3-4 inches of new sap! We expect the sap to continue running into the night and will need to start boiling off the sap we have on hand early tomorrow as we'll need room in the tanks for another anticipated banner day. So, the sugar season finally gets geared up in earnest. We'll be boiling all day tomorrow if anyone would like to stop by and observe the process. In addition, I have no doubt we'll be gathering again tomorrow. We'll provide the time in our report tomorrow if anyone would like to participate.

Wednesday morning March 20

Well, it looks like we'll be back in the maple syrup making business---yeah!! Kristina and Meg, it took a bit longer, but, your ritual sap dance and offering to the tree gods yesterday finally worked as we had a decent sap run into the night last night. I guess it just took the full day yesterday for the trees to get your message and finally warm up.

A good number of the bags and buckets are roughly 1/3 full and with the expected sunshine and warmer temperatures today, I'm thinking we could have a banner sap day---think positive!

So, the plan is to start gathering sap today around 4:30-5:00 pm this afternoon if anyone would like to participate, you'd certainly be welcome. If the sap runs harder than expected and there's a risk of the bags and buckets overflowing (wishful thinking), we'll move up the gathering time. Stay tuned if you plan on participating.

Depending on the amount of sap gathered, we'll decide whether to fire up the evaporator this evening or wait until tomorrow. If we have enough sap for multiple syrup "take offs", we may wait until Thursday morning so we can boil continuously for the entire day. Once the evaporator is fully heated, it's most efficient to keep it going for as long as we have sap to boil. Once fully fired and boiling at a rapid pace, provided we have enough sap, we can "take-off" roughly 1.5 to 2 gallons of syrup every 3 or so hours.

Tuesday afternoon March 19

Kristina and Meg, I'm sad to report your ritual sap dance and sacrifice this morning did not do the trick. Heidi and I just checked the trees/spiles and only a few were dripping slowly and the sap flowing from a good number of spiles was actually freezing and forming sap icicles into the bags and buckets. The cold temperature of last night and today (low to mid-thirties) along with the clouds moving in this afternoon blocking much of the sunlight have once again foiled any significant sap flow. We even saw a few snowflakes. In addition, the ice which formed last night in the bags, buckets and large gathering tank has yet to fully thaw. Like yesterday, we may get an inch or two of additional sap in some of the bags and buckets with a late afternoon run, but, not enough to gather. Hopefully with the predicted warmer weather tomorrow we'll have an afternoon gather, however, the forecast calls for the temperature to drop into the upper teens again tonight----too cold! Only time will tell.

Monday March 18

started with a bright Sun and deep blue skies, however, around mid-day the clouds rolled in with a few snow showers in the afternoon with the temperatures barely getting above freezing. As a result, only an inch or two of sap accumulated in the bags and buckets which froze solid last night. It's currently about 20 degrees and sunny with the temperatures forecast to rise to around 40 degrees today. I'll supplement this report mid-afternoon, but, we're sure hoping the Sun stays out bright and strong and we get a good run of sap today which we'll gather late in the day or early evening. Tomorrow looks promising as well. Stay tuned!

Sun 3/17/2019 4:16 PM

In taking Heidi for her evening walk, we noticed a good number of the trees had run to a greater degree than we thought. To avoid having large chunks of ice in those bags and buckets in the morning (ice can cause seams on buckets to burst as well), we decided at that moment to do a quick gather. So, with the spiles freezing before our eyes, ice forming on the insides of the buckets and in the line from the tank in the woods to the road, we were able to gather about 50 gallons of sap. Enough to make about a gallon of syrup, but, we'll wait until we have more sap on hand before firing up the evaporator. Despite our efforts, a good amount of ice had already accumulated in the bags and will remain there until it thaws. Hopefully by tomorrow afternoon when we hope we'll have a larger gather.

Sun 3/17/2019 1:27 PM

Happy St. Patrick's Day Everyone!

It was a cold day, but, mostly sunny with a beautiful blue sky and afternoon temperatures reaching the mid-30's with a chilly wind---refreshing. With the cold last night (about 22 degrees this morning) and for most of the day today, the sap didn't start running until about 3 pm. While the spiles in the Sun are dripping hard we will not gather sap today. Perhaps tomorrow afternoon. The forecast calls for temperatures to fall into the mid-teens tonight. Again, colder than we like as any sap in the bags and buckets will freeze solid and the trees will take some time to warm up before the sap starts to run. Tomorrow the temperature is forecast to rise to around 40 degrees with some Sun. We should know by mid-afternoon whether or not we will gather.

My super hard working buddy, Sol and I however made good use of the cold day today by cutting wood for the garage pot-bellied stove and refilling the woodbin in the garage. We also split wood and refilled the outdoor garage woodshed with wood for the evaporator. Certainly enough wood to last thru the week, if not beyond. Thanks much Sol. Although, I was remis and forgot to send Sol home with syrup. Heidi also kept us company while we worked. A "good wood" day and great day to be outdoors!

Fri 3/15/2019 7:36 AM

The temperature didn't fall below freezing last night. As a result, only a little sap accumulated in the bags and buckets yesterday afternoon and overnight night. We're hoping there's 75-100 gallons out there---enough to make another couple of gallons of syrup.

The weather report calls for a warm day with improving conditions (i.e. no rain) as the day progresses, so, our plan is to start gathering sap around 3 pm and fire up the evaporator tomorrow morning to boil.

The weekend weather report calls for a return to colder temperatures which will hopefully start the sap flowing once again. Looking at the long term forecast, the temperatures look good next week, but, thereafter another warmup. As predicted by some of the "old-timers", we may be in for a very short sugar season. Signs of spring are literally in the air as we can hear the geese overhead as I type and the bees were out in force yesterday along with additional insect life. Several of the bags and buckets emptied yesterday had spiders and moths in them---customarily a sign that the sugar season is nearing its end. Borrowing an amusing comment from one of you, it may be time to invest in maple syrup futures!

Thu, Mar 14, 2019 at 10:25 PM

It was a productive day in the sugar house. This morning with the help of several hard working folks, including one I have nicknamed "The Machine" (you know who you are!) we gathered just shy of 210 gallons of wonderfully clear sap. Thereafter, we made and bottled about 5 gallons of delicious "light" maple syrup.

So far, we estimate roughly 40 gallons of sap has translated into one gallon of syrup.

We'll check the bags and buckets in the morning to determine whether we'll have another gather tomorrow. I'm thinking it's a good possibility.

Thu, Mar 14, 2019 at 8:25 AM

Well, the temperature only got down to about 35 degrees last night so we may not get much of a sap run today. And, the forecast calls for the temperature not to drop below freezing again until at the earliest Saturday night. Recall that we need the temperature to be below freezing at night (but, not too cold) and above freezing during the day for the sap to flow.

However, as expected, the sap ran into the night and I'm happy to report we've got a fair amount (I estimate about 175 gallons) of sap to be gathered today. So, we'll be back in the syrup making business today---yeah!

Wed, Mar 13, 2019 at 12:58 PM

The sap currently in the bags and buckets is still frozen solid. In addition, the spiles on only a few trees (primarily in the Sun) were dripping sap, albeit very slowly as of just a few minutes ago.

I imagine the sap will start flowing later today and run into the night.

So, we're now looking at tomorrow late afternoon for the next gather. I'll send an email tomorrow with an update and hopefully a time when we'll gather sap. We're ready to make syrup, we just need the sap!

Wed, Mar 13, 2019 at 8:36 AM

While the Sun is out with bright beautiful blue skies, it was a cold night, well into the teens. So, it will take some time for the trees to thaw and sap to run. We'll just have to wait and see whether we gather today as planned or wait until tomorrow. There's a good chance the sap won't start to run until late in the day and then run into the night.

Mon, Mar 11, 2019 at 10:37 AM

With the assistance of Judy and Terry we put about 150 spiles in the hard maple trees on Friday and another 30 on Saturday morning with Jonathan, Courtney, Cale and Harley.

Saturday started cold with the temperature around 5 degrees. It warmed up nicely on Saturday, however, with the cold morning, the sap didn't start running until the mid-afternoon but did run into the night. Not nearly enough to gather.

We received 2-3 inches of snow Saturday night and, once again, the temperature didn't rise above freezing until mid-afternoon on Sunday. Still not enough sap to gather by evening, but, the sap continued to run into the night.

This morning a good number of the bags/buckets are about ½ full, so we will have our first gather this afternoon around 3:30 pm and start boiling tonight----finally!!

Tue, Feb 19, 2019 at 10:51 AM

Well, the maple syrup season is just around the corner. Joan and I plan on finishing our preparation today and tomorrow so we'll be ready to tap the trees when the weather's right---i.e. consistently below freezing at night and above during the day.

We considered putting the spiles in this week (tree taps) as the temperatures look good for the sap to run, but, based on the long term forecast, it looks to return to cold temperatures next week and into early March. We don't want to gather and then have the sap sit for days and days as that will affect the quality of syrup.