

MARKET MUSINGS

By Jan Freedman

Spring has sprung at last and we can now look forward to the weather warming and the disappearance of the remainder of the snow. As I sit at my computer today, Sunday, the room is filled with bright sunshine, although the temperature is a bit on the chilly side. I'm hoping that it improves from here.

This is the time of year that several of our farmers are involved in collecting sap and making maple syrup, so here is some information I learned from them and the internet about maple syrup.

Peter Brooks of Brooks Farm tells me that sap flows in maple trees from late February to late April, depending on the year. Sap will only flow in temperatures between -1 to +9C. Ontario, Quebec and Vermont account for almost all of the world's syrup due to climate and species range.

Apparently, there is some confusion as to the origin of maple syrup. Many believe that the North American Native Peoples were the first to collect sap and turn it into maple syrup, before recorded history. The Algonquin tribe was thought to be the first to discover 'sinzibuckwud', their word for maple syrup which, literally, means 'drawn from wood'.

They used tomahawks to cut v-shaped incisions in trees. Then, they inserted reeds or concave bark pieces to run the sap into birch bark buckets. The sap was then concentrated by putting hot stones into the bucket or leaving it overnight and disposing of the layer of ice in the morning.

It was consumed as a sweet drink or used in cooking.

Before the Europeans came, the Native People used clay pots to boil the sap over fires protected by a roof of tree branches. This was the first version of the sugar shack. Over the years, this evolved to become not only a place where maple syrup was produced, but also a gathering place to enjoy a traditional meal.

Some historians believe that the Native People didn't have the technology or tools to make maple syrup. They believe that it was the first white settlers and fur traders who introduced wooden buckets as well as iron and copper buckets to the process.

During early colonization, the Natives showed the French settlers how to tap the trees, harvest the sap and boil it to evaporate some of the water. This custom quickly became part of colony life as the syrup was a major source of high quality pure sugar.

Production methods have been streamlined since colonial days but remain essentially the same.

Our final indoor market of this year at the Aurora Cultural Centre takes place from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. on Saturday, March 28. These are the vendors who are expected to be there: 19th Avenue Farm, Pioneer Honey, Oakridges Finest, Snowden Farm, Kind Organics, Nature's Rainbow, Boulangerie St. George, Rustic Bread, Nutmeg Bake Shop, Catharina's Kitchen, Jan's Country Pantry, Rob's Good Food, Green River Coffee, Sass Tea Co., Captain Ted's Knick Knacks, Eva Designs, Limitless Jewellery, Catch My Drift, Green Leaf Designs, Robert Pow, Heartsease Co., Kibo Soaps, SDD Flags, YRFN, and Anli Sheng.

Come to visit your favourite vendors and welcome spring to the Market. You will not see us again until we open the outdoor season on May 2.

See you at the Indoor Market!