

Record-breaking Maple Syrup crop harvested by Sappers in Northwest Aurora



It's been a bountiful Spring for the Sugaring Aurora Project.

The maple syrup co-op comprised of 18 families whose properties extend into a Sugar Maple bush in northwest Aurora shattered its production record during the wee hours of Wednesday morning.

On its eighth and final boil of the 2026 season, SAP's intrepid finishing team pulled the evaporator pan laden with bubbling syrup from the wood stove at 1.15 a.m. and decanted more than 20 liters of dark, late-season goodness.

Dave Hunt, co-founder of the Sugaring Aurora Project, labeled the group's final sweet product as "The Dark Side of the Moon: Batch 8A."

During the decanting process in the Sugar Shack, Hunt speculated that the 2026 yield had reached approximately 150 liters. However, after the kitchen team had methodically filtered, re-boiled, and sealed the precious liquids in mason jars, Hunt fine-tuned the final count: "After the last liters were jarred, we had achieved a new record of 147 gorgeous bottles of syrup."

The 147 liters of organic maple syrup derived from eight boiling sessions eclipsed SAP's previous record of 125 set twice previously in the group's eight-season history, but Hunt acknowledged that those record-setting crops were completed "with thirteen separate boils each year."

The tireless leader of the group expressed his gratitude toward dozens of neighbours, especially their concerted effort in late-March.

"Everyone put in dedicated hours during our most impressive run. That was an extraordinary amount of sap to process and we did it with such commitment."

The season didn't start in the most promising manner. The first three boils in early-March yielded only 30 liters of syrup. However, climatic conditions changed dramatically in late-March and the Moraine Sugar Bush starting producing sap at incredible rates. It was all hands on deck at the five depots.

Neighbours, many clad in their traditional red-and-black plaid SAP jackets, toted thousands of liters of sap in 18-litre collection pails and transported them in a convoy of wagons to the Sugar Shack.

Hunt described the energy in the neighbourhood and the Herculean feats of so many.

What was wild this season was that an incredible amount of sap came in such a short span. Taking in 4,000 liters of sap from 18 houses, processing and boiling it down to maple syrup in only seven days required a remarkable amount of commitment by the boil team and all the neighbours stepping up to collect.

The collection and water-removing process to which Hunt alluded featured a series of time-consuming steps. The 17-litre collection pails were poured into a filter at the top of a 210-liter vat. The sap was then processed through a Reverse Osmosis machine which removed water from the sap and raised its sugar content from 2% out of the tree to treated sap comprised of 6.5% sugar.

The concentrated sap was pre-heated in pots and then boiled on the group's old school, three-channeled evaporator powered by a traditional woodstove. Despite the time-saving benefits of Reverse Osmosis technology, the sheer volume of sap collected by the spirited volunteers led to long boiling days-- including seventeen hours for Boil #7 and eleven hours for Boil #8 as the season drew to a close.

The second last boil on Monday night was a wild experience complete with thunder, lightning, and rain conjuring up the famous opening words uttered by Macbeth: "So fair and foul a day I have not seen."

After the hurly-burly was done, Hunt summarized how the battle had been won.

After seventeen hours on the evaporator and during a thunder storm with lightning striking all around we were left with a batch of the finest-looking and tastiest syrup we've ever made. It was a great team effort!

In addition to ensuring that the Reverse Osmosis machine kept purring throughout this year's collection times, Hunt also pointed to a few improvements that SAP made in 2026 to ensure this season's significant yield.

As is the case with any successful enterprise, there are always improvements to a project. We were so successful this season because of three time-saving tools: a line and tap connector we named "The Game Changer." We also added a little machine called "The Purple Egg" which correctly identifies what colour category each batch of finished syrup fits into: golden delicious, amber, or dark. The purchase of a little tool for accurately determining when you've boiled your syrup in a range of 66.0 to 68.9 took the guesswork out of achieving perfect sugar content and temperature. Finally, the return and addition of work-hungry neighbours willing to transport pails from all over the neighbourhood at all hours of the day in all weather conditions.

As a climactic event to cap a successful season, the Sugaring Aurora Project will be conducting its annual taste-testing session. Based on the results of that kitchen session, SAP will submit this year's best syrup samples to the Royal Agricultural Winter Fair in the Hobby category.

SAP won the gold medal at The Royal in 2023 and 2024, and the northwest Aurora team is aiming for a return to the podium in Fall 2026 after five weeks of work in the Sugar Maple Bush.

From the group's initial trek through the snowy woods toting ladders, drills, and thousands of feet of blue plastic sap lines to tap dozens of trees in February to the climactic final boils amid Mother Nature's electrical fury as the calendar flipped to April, the SAP team came through in the clutch and a Gold Medal at the Royal Agricultural Winter Fair would be the crowning achievement.

Until then, the litres of liquid gold will be meted out to the participating families to enhance pancake or waffle breakfasts and brunches this Spring.

Author's Note: I loved writing the draft of this feature at Tim Horton's fueled by a medium London Fog and an Apple Fritter. It felt like the ultimate Canadian experience writing about record-breaking maple syrup production and neighbourhood camaraderie

while enjoying the comfy confines of a Leaf Legend's classic donut shop here in Town. It was an epiphanic moment at Wellington and John West Way: writing at the centerpiece hockey rink table and reflecting just how maple syrup, coffee and donuts, and hockey are such quintessential Canadian experiences. Enjoying a beverage and snack at the Hall of Famer's restaurant-- while extolling the virtues of making maple syrup--offered layers of meaning and warmed up a miserable rainy April day in Aurora. Fortunately, I'm escaping the muck and mire of early-April. Our GTA golf group is flying to Portugal (instead of the USA) to play six rounds at three courses ? Espiche, Boavista, and San Antonio ? near our rented oceanfront villa in Salema. We'll do some sight-seeing along the picturesque southern coast, too. Perhaps there will be a winery or two along the way. Travelogue to follow.

By Jim Stewart