



From Tree to Table

MAGGIE PETERSON/GRAPHIC

BY MAGGIE PETERSON
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Springtime is syrup time for Terri and Dave Parsons.

The Charlevoix couple is keeping up the tradition of Harwood Heritage Gold syrup on the family's centennial farm. Dave remembers helping his grandfather, George, and father, William, harvest the sap.

"They originally started making it for their own use," Dave noted of his relatives.

The operation has grown from that time, and the Parsons are expanding again this year by more than doubling the number of taps. In past years, they've had about 1,000; this year, they will have about 2,200.

The trees are tapped by drilling a hole into the trunk with a cordless drill, and this year it's expected to be done in early March. An adapter attached to a tube is stuck into the hole, and the sap will flow down the tube, which is blue.

These blue tubes go from each tap into a main line, which leads to a collection center. All the tubing is vacuum-sealed as of this year, which will allow the sap to flow without restriction.

In the two areas where they tap trees, Dave estimates there are between four and five miles of tubing.

Once the tanks in the center fill up, the sap is pumped into another tank outside. From this tank, the sap is pumped into Dave's truck, which travels a short distance down the road to a holding tank where it will be processed — the former milk house on his property.

The sap then is moved through the reverse osmosis machine. The machine pushes the sap through a filter, which separates the water and sugar.

"It pushes the water through and holds the sap back," Dave noted.

About 70 to 75 percent of the water is removed and sent down the drain, while the concentrated sap heads to the evaporator.

Similar to the other equipment, the reverse osmosis machine is the latest in

syrup machine technology.

"It took us a while for us to change it from how grandpa did it because it was tradition," Terri said.

The reverse osmosis machine cuts the boiling time by more than a day and a half. What used to take about two days takes about two hours now.

Dave noted that adding the reverse osmosis machine to the process has cut more than just time; fuel costs have gone down as well by decreasing the boiling time.

From the reverse osmosis machine, the less water-heavy sap heads to a holding tank, from which it will be fed into the flue pan of the evaporator.

"(The flue pan) is where the majority of the evaporation of the water takes place," Dave noted.

From the flue pan it heads to the syrup pans, where final processing takes place. Once it hits the boiling point and the law-required minimum of 66 brix, it's syrup. The liquid is drawn off into a can.

From the can the syrup is pumped through a filter press, which removes any impurities.

"It's the same type of product they use in swimming pools but it's made specially for syrup," Dave noted.

From the filter press, it is either canned or put into bulk storage for canning later.

It's a lot of work, but for Dave and Terri it's a way to carry on the tradition.

"Part of it is part of our heritage. I enjoy doing it, it's something that we've always done as a family," Dave said.

Added Terri, "It's just a special time of the year." **G**

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■ "It's just a special time of the year."

Terri Parsons



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Terri (left) and Dave Parsons continue the family tradition of making maple syrup on their farm.



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The evaporator machine into which the sap flows before the water is extracted.

WANT SOME OF THE PARSONS' SYRUP? LOOK HERE:

www.harwoodgold.com

Symons General Store, Petoskey
Don's IGA, Harbor Springs and Charlevoix
Marvin's Gardens, Charlevoix
Harbor View Cafe, Charlevoix
Original Pancake House, Bay Harbor
Mackinaw Crossings, Mackinaw City

SYRUP NUTRITIONAL FACTS:

In one tablespoon of maple syrup, on average there are:

Calories: 52
Calories from fat: 0
Total fat: 0 g
Saturated fat: 0 g
Cholesterol: 0 mg
Sodium: 2 mg
Total Carbohydrate: 13 g
Dietary Fiber: 0 g
Sugars: 12 g
Protein: 0 g

Source: www.nutritiondata.com

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Dave Parsons

Tapping maple trees:



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1 Drill a 1/2" hole in the trunk of a sugar maple with a cordless drill a few feet off the ground.



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2 Plug the hole with the adapter firmly by hitting the butt end with a mallet.



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3 Connect the adapter to the tubing and let the sap flow downhill where it can be collected easily.