FOOD&WINE

The State-by-State Guide to Maple Season in New England

Maple weekends sweeten winter from Maine to Vermont.

By Adam H. Callaghan | Published on February 21, 2025

Photo: Courtesy of Morse Farm Maple Sugarworks

Maple syrup season is a special time in New England. Also known as maple sugaring season, it's the period when the nights freeze and the days thaw, causing lightly sugary tree sap to run. "That's important to our people as a first sign of spring, a new beginning," says Lorén Spears, an enrolled member of the Narragansett tribe and the executive director of the Tomaquag Museum in Exeter, Rhode Island. One of the annual 13 Thanksgivings that mark a reciprocal life with nature, it meant a sweet harvest for Indigenous tribes after surviving another hard winter living primarily off stored food.

Today, it still means the arrival of sweet treats for locals and visitors who can tour farms throughout New England — typically from February through April, although climate change is affecting the season, shifting it earlier or shortening it. Here's where to learn

how sugarhouses or sugar shacks turn maple sap into maple syrup and, most importantly, taste the delicious results.

What is maple syrup?

Courtesy of Treehouse Brand Maple Syrup

For thousands of years, Native peoples in the region have been collecting what they call sweet water, particularly from the sugar maple, whose sap has a high sugar content and therefore turns to syrup more easily than that of other trees. In the past, Spears says, the spouts hammered into the trees would be carved of stone or bone, and the liquid would drip into a makuk, a watertight container woven of birch bark. The sap would get heated over a fire in a shallow wooden trough. As water evaporated, the sugar would condense into maple syrup, then grainy maple sugar, then glass-like maple candy, providing a rare source of natural sweetener that was easy to travel with.

Tap Into Everything You Need to Know About Maple Syrup

European colonizers adopted this practice, eventually turning it into a big business and modernizing it with metal spouts and troughs, plastic buckets, and new forms of heat. Overall, though, the process remains the same: cooking down at least 40 gallons of sap for hours to produce a gallon of syrup, which explains the relatively high cost. It’s laborious, but the sight and smell of maple steam billowing inside a sugar shack is sweet indeed, and there’s nothing quite like trying the final product in the woods where it was born. Here's a state-by-state guide to maple season in New England.

Rhode Island

Coggeshall Farm Museum, in partnership with Old Sturbridge Village, interprets daily life on a salt marsh farm from the late 18th century. At its Maple Sugaring Days (February 22-23 and March 1-2), visitors can see a rustic version of the tradition, including the carving of wooden spiles for tapping the trees.

Rhode Island is famous for its johnnycakes, cornmeal pancakes that can be thick (South County) or thin (Newport County style) depending on the region. Lorén Spears of the Tomaquag Museum says they come from the Native American journey cake, sweetened with maple syrup and so named because “you could take it on a journey with you in your pouch, add dried fruits, nuts, proteins, and end up with a complete meal to go.” Try crispy johnnycakes topped with maple syrup at Jigger’s Diner in East Greenwich.