



February 2024

# THE WÁHTA? TIMES

## ONEIDA CULTURAL HERITAGE

Challenge: Can you find and circle the four maple tapping tools scattered in this paper?

Wáhta? Twanehela:tú·

Maple we thank it

Spring Time

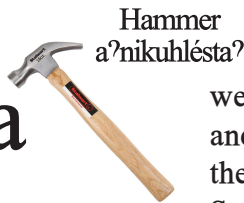
**Maple Time:** Is it time to tap the trees? What does that all entail? Have we heard the thunders? Do you know how to identify a maple tree? Do you have all the tools? Why do we do a tobacco burning? Where and how do you tap? How much sap makes a gallon of syrup? When is the maple thanksgiving ceremony held? What are the health benefits of our syrup?



### Benefits of Maple Syrup

- > It is an excellent source of Manganese, Riboflavin, Calcium, Zinc.
- > It is rich in antioxidants and anti-inflammatory properties.
- > It also promotes healthy liver, brain function and is a healthy addition to the daily diet.

## Oneida Maple Tradition



When the warm winds once again begin to circulate we will hear the return of our Grandfather's the Thunderer's from their long winter absence. That's the natural sign or occurrence that has to happen before we can go out and tap the maple trees. The lightning stimulates the root system of the maple trees which purifies the sap as it once again begins to flow up the tree to its extremities. Before we can go out and tap, we are to do a tobacco burning to extend our greetings, thankfulness and love to the maple trees that they are still fulfilling their responsibilities. As indigenous people, this is the way that we express our highest regard to the maple tree and honoring them. This tobacco burning ceremony is usually done around the first part of March and each camp in the community will do their own. It all depends on the weather as to when it will be done. We have to wait until we hear the Thunderer's!

We look to the maple tree as the leader of all of the trees. They are the first trees to wake up from the long winter. Historically this is where we've always gotten our sugar. From the sap

we can also make candy, syrup and taffy. In our creation story the Creator said that "Maple Sapling" will be the name that the all of creation will call him. The reason has to do with the characteristic of a maple sapling. When they are real young you can bend it all over the place and it won't break. And the say this is how the Creator's mind is, that he is very insightful and will bend over backwards to help us. Whatever we do or say that may be harmful to ourselves or others the Creator will understand why we did it.

For the tobacco burning, a small fire is built near a maple tree where you camp is going to be. Everyone is to contribute a pinch of the sacred tobacco and a person is asked to speak on behalf of all of the people who have gathered. Our indigenous language is the means in which we communicate to creation. The tobacco that we use is the old sacred tobacco, the kind that you can't buy in stores. You have to grow it yourself or barter with someone that grows it. In our creation story they say that this particular plant came from the Creator's world. Because of that we are to show our utmost respect to this plant for the sacred gift that it has. When we burn the tobacco, whatever the message is that we want to convey to creation or to the Creator, the smoke will pierce the sky and is the conduit on a spiritual level to deliver the message we are asking of. Our spiritual elders from long ago

say that when we use our sacred tobacco all of creation listens up right away and pays extra attention to what is being said.

The words in the tobacco burning ask all of creation for a safe time while the people are in the woods working. The children are instructed not to wander too far away from camp lest someone will get hurt. The animals are asked for permission to allow us to come into their home so we may harvest the sap and not to be afraid of us while we're there. From the winds, moon, sun and stars are all asked for their cooperation so that we will have beautiful days during the harvesting of the sap. The four sacred beings who are our protectors are asked to watch over the people so nobody gets hurt. Lastly, the Creator is asked to assure that no great harm comes to those harvesting the sap. Thus all of creation is acknowledged. Then the people can go out and set up their sugar camps and tap the maple trees.

Once the camps are all done harvesting the sap and everything is cleaned up, a day is picked by the Faithkeepers to give thanks for what the people have been able to harvest. The Faithkeepers are responsible of insuring that all of our ceremonies are being conducted throughout the year. For the maple ceremony, the sap is used as a medicine for everyone to drink and to give our personal thanks to the maple tree. Two Great Feather dances are done.

The Great Feather dance is one of the four sacred ceremonies that the Creator had sent here via a messenger as a way through dance and song to honor elements of the natural world as well as the Creator. The first Great Feather dance is to honor the maple tree and the second is to honor the Creator for providing us with all of the sustenance of life. The sap drink is passed out in between the Feather dances.

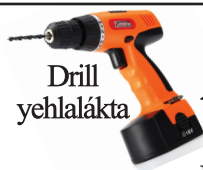
So you see in doing these ceremonies we are fulfilling our responsibility to creation by honoring the many different life forces throughout the year that we depend upon in order for us to live. This is what our ancestors have been doing since the beginning of time when they were instructed how to give back to creation. It's the same thing as when we extend a helping hand to someone in need. It not only makes that person feel appreciation for what we did, we also feel gratified for our act of kindness; it's reciprocal. Creation senses this same care giving. The Creator wanted us to always have a respectful relationship with everything in creation. This is a lifelong commitment and challenge that we make daily while we're here on our mother the earth. If we listen to our spirit that's telling us all the time what we need to do, we will be fulfilling our responsibility to ourselves and creation. These acts lead us to inner peace.

**How can you identify a maple tree if the leaves have all fallen off?**

Easy! Look at the bark. Maple tree bark is grey, and looks scratched, like a bear dug its nails into it. The branches are silver and smooth with branches growing parallel or opposite of each other.



# Maple Thanksgiving



So you want to tap a tree?

Né· ka?i·kál wahnisláté  
Now on this day

Waknehela·tú tsi? she·kú wa?katkátho? wa?kahnekínikane? wáhta?  
I give thanks that still I am able to see sap has flowed of the maple.

Né· tsi? nikatstahsló·ta né·  
Ayukwanúhkwa?t akáhake.  
Now kind of energy and power it will be our medicine it will be.

Tsi? she·kú kato·kál akáhake.  
That yet it continues it will be.

Né· wakli?wá·neke? tsyóhslat  
Awahkwata·sé· né· tsá·kate  
Akya?ta·láke.  
I wish for one year it will come around the same I will be a part of it.

Ta· tho nyohtúhak yukwa?nikúhla?  
Now this shall be our minds.

Maple is the leader of all of the trees, and wakes up in the early spring to share its sap. Before we begin tapping the tree, it is essential that we offer the tree tobacco and give thanks that it is continuing its responsibilities. We set our intentions with the tree and gain permission to tap.

Next we find a good spot to tap where the wood is healthy and we can reach the spout. It is recommended to tap on the south side, since it receives most of the sunlight, and to make the hole above a large root or below a large branch. Using a drill, make a hole in the tree that is 5/8" wide and about 2.5-3" deep. Insert the tap into the hole and tap it gently with a hammer. Set up your bucket or bag and you are good to go. Make sure to check your tree daily to avoid overflow. The sap is our medicine, and we don't want to waste it. When the tree begins to bud or the weather is no longer freezing at night, it is time to pull the taps. Happy tapping!



## NOTES ON MAPLE CEREMONY

Have you ever wondered what happens at the Maple Ceremony at the Oneida Longhouse?

The following is a brief overview.

Wáhta? Twanehela·tú·  
Maple we thank it

Bucket  
kaná·tsi?



-Kanehelatúksla Thanksgiving Address/Opening  
On each side of the house the speakers will ask if any family has had misfortune/this will also be mentioned.

-"Inform the minds" - the agenda/what will happen today.  
The singers and dancers will also be selected from each side.  
We are encouraged by the speakers to be mindful why we are here today - to give thanks to the maple and that it continues to be a medicine for the people.

-Ohstowa?kó· - Great Feather Dance/Thanks to the maples.

-Speaker will thank all the people for their participation.

-2 men are selected to pass the maple drink. One bucket for the men, one for the women. As the maple drink is passed out, people may stand and offer their personal words of thanksgiving.

-Ohstowa?kó· - Great Feather Dance/Thanks to the Creator

-Acknowledgment of what has been accomplished.

-Takwanuhwela·tú· - Closing

-Feast



## SUBSTITUTING WHITE SUGAR WITH MAPLE SYRUP OR MAPLE SUGAR

FOR EACH CUP OF SUGAR A RECIPE CALLS FOR, USE 3/4 CUP OF MAPLE SYRUP AND REDUCE THE OTHER LIQUIDS BY 1/4 CUP.

USING GRANULATED MAPLE SUGAR IS EVEN EASIER AS IT CAN BE SUBSTITUTED 1:1 IN ANY RECIPE!

VISIT  
WWW.VERMONTMAPLE.ORG  
FOR MORE MAPLE INSPIRATION!



DID YOU KNOW... MAPLE SYRUP IS HIGH IN HEALTHFUL ANTIOXIDANTS AND NATURALLY INCLUDES ESSENTIAL MINERALS SUCH AS CALCIUM, MAGNESIUM, POTASSIUM, AND MANGANESE.

## Maple Syrup Nutrition Benefits

- Manganese- a trace mineral  
Helps enzymes important in energy production and antioxidant defenses  
22 percent of daily value in 1 ounce of maple syrup  
Supports your immune system
- Zinc-a trace mineral  
Antioxidant  
Helps decrease the progression of heart disease  
Supports your immune system which may help decrease inflammation, thus supporting healing
- Natural- Does not contain HIGH Fructose Corn Syrup

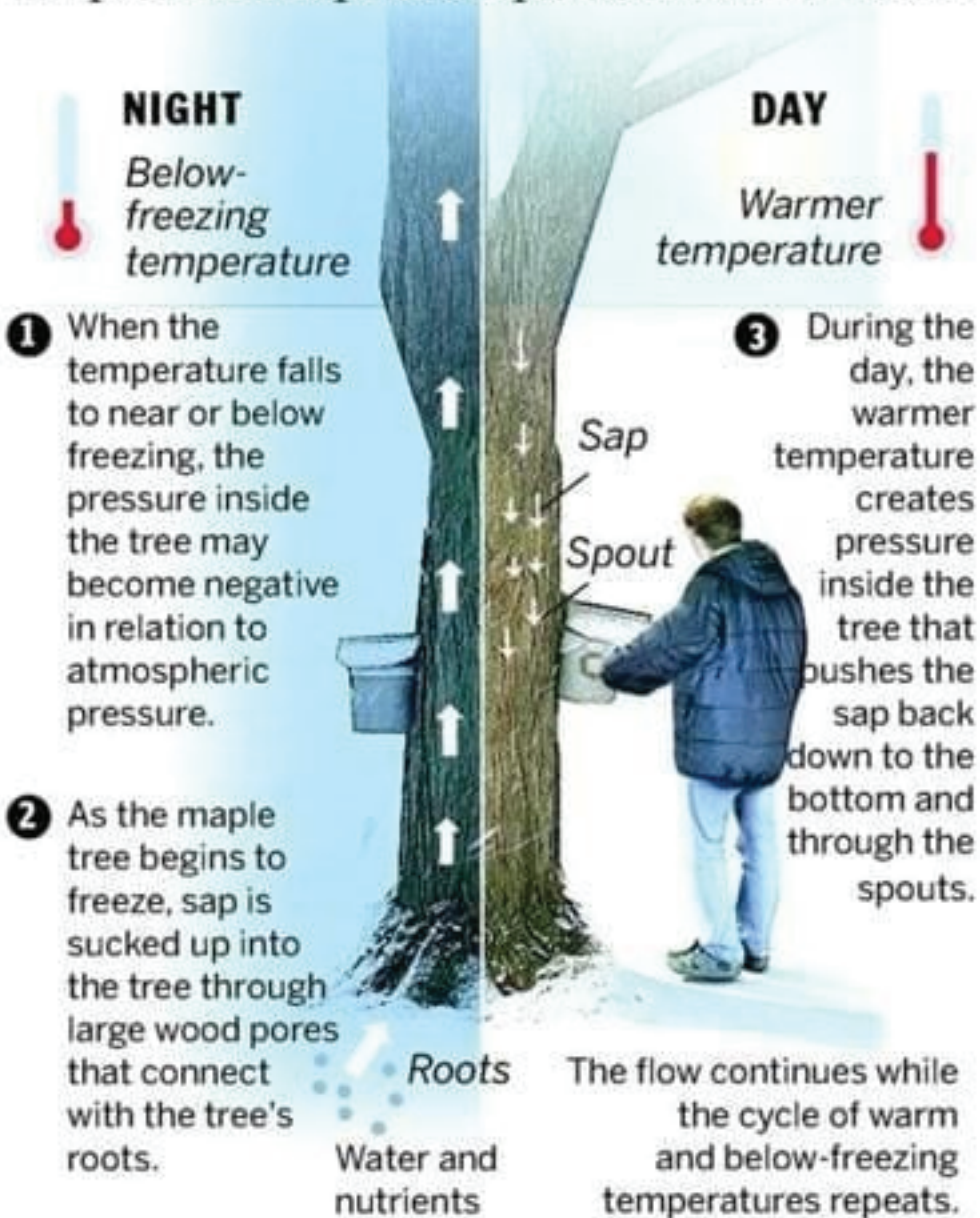
### Maple Syrup Drawbacks

- Keep portion size small at 1-2 TBSP
- 1/4 cup · Calories-200
- Carbohydrate (Sugar): 53 gram
- The maximum amount of sugar is 10% of your daily calories, which would be for a 2,000 calorie diet would be 50 grams of sugar



## How the sap flows

Sap flow from sugar maples is an entirely temperature dependent process. How it works:



SOURCE: Massachusetts Maple Producers Association

Javier Zarracina/GLOBE STAFF