

Join Me for a Cooking Class!
Winter-Spring 2008 Schedule

January

18 French Country Cooking

February

1 Italian Country Kitchen

15 French Country Cooking

29 Italian Country Kitchen

March

7 Mediterranean Easter Feast

28 Tapas & Finger Food

April

4 Italian Country Kitchen

18 French Country Cooking

May

2 Italian Country Kitchen

16 French Country Cooking

June

6 Summer Salads

Join me in the Kitchen & Around the Table for delicious seasonal food & fun
Details & Menus on the Web
www.susannye.com

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Contact Susan Nye at

susannye@tds.net

or 603/526 7319

More information the web at

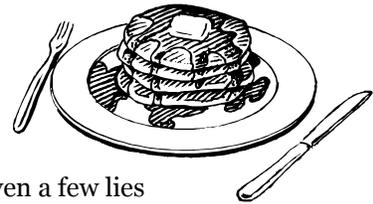
www.susannye.com



The calendar tells us that spring has sprung even though there is a twelve or fifteen foot snow bank at the end of my driveway. Still we can't deny, the days are finally getting longer, warmer and sunnier although the nights are still pretty darn cold. This change in the weather heralds not just the tail end of winter but sugaring season. Take a long walk through the country and you may spot lots of metal buckets hanging from maple trees. Or more likely you'll see a strange tangle of plastic tubing running from tree to tree.

In the coming weeks, sap will be collected from sugar maples across New England and in Canada. Depending on the weather, maple syrup production can begin as early as February and can continue through to April. Freezing nights and warm days are needed to get the sap flowing. To draw the sap, taps or spouts are inserted into the maple trees. Historically, buckets were then hung on the taps to collect the sap. Today most syrup producers attach plastic tubing not buckets to the taps. This innovation, while less picturesque, saves the back breaking work of gathering and emptying bucket after bucket of sap. The tubing deposits the sap directly into large metal tanks.

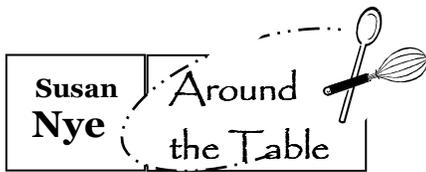
After collecting the sap, it goes to the sugar house for sugaring-off. Sugaring-off is the simple, but long and tedious process of boiling the sap until the sugars concentrate into sweet syrup. It takes lots and lots of boiling and evaporation to transform the watery sap into the amber gold we enjoy on our pancakes. One gallon of pure maple syrup starts out as roughly forty gallons of sap.



Since sap runs during the day, most sugaring-off is done at night. Long past midnight and into the wee hours of the morning, sap will boil and steam. To pass the time and avoid nodding off, tall tales and maybe even a few lies are swapped as the sap slowly turns to gold. Not surprisingly, all that boiling produces lots and lots of steam. Unless you want to turn your house into a sauna don't try to make syrup in your kitchen. It's best that you take your sugaring-off outside or, better yet, to a well ventilated sugar house. Drive through rural New England and you will see large sheds in many a backyard. If the shed has a stovepipe, it may do more than store lawnmowers in winter and snow blowers in summer, it may be a sugar house.

Even if you don't have a sugar house you can celebrate the sugaring season with a "sugar on snow" party. You don't need any fancy equipment to celebrate this old New England tradition. On the next sunny day gather a group of friends and plenty of kids. Buy some pure maple syrup from a local producer, or if you must from the supermarket. Find an old pot, add some syrup and boil it outside on your barbeque grill or fire pit. It will take some time, so you can build a few snowmen, shovel the driveway or just swap a few tall tales or lies with your neighbors. Don't stray far from the fire and keep a watchful eye on the pot of simmering syrup, checking it often until it reaches about 235 degrees. You can use a candy thermometer to determine the temperature. As soon as it reaches temperature, be careful not to burn yourself while you gently drizzle the thick, hot syrup onto clean snow. Let the cold snow do its work and voilà, the thick syrup will quickly harden into sweet, chewy taffy. Party revelers just lift the taffy out of the snow and enjoy!

Bon appétit! - Susan



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Roasted Fruit

Roast tart apples, tangy cranberries and sweet grapes with a little maple syrup for a wonderful winter treat. Serve warm with ice cream or at room temperature with yogurt and granola. Enjoy!

Serves 8-10

2 cup fresh or frozen cranberries
2 cup red seedless grapes
3 Granny Smith apples, cored and cut into 8ths
4 tablespoons butter, melted
Juice of 1/2 orange
Zest of 1/2 orange
1 teaspoon cinnamon
1/4 teaspoon nutmeg
Pinch of salt
1 tablespoon brown sugar
1/4 cup maple syrup

1. Preheat the oven to 425 degrees F.
2. Place the fruit in a large mixing bowl and drizzle with melted butter and orange juice. Add the orange zest, cinnamon, nutmeg, sugar and maple syrup. Toss to coat and spread the fruit out in a single layer onto a baking sheet. Bake until the apples are tender and the fruit is beginning to brown on the edges, about 25 to 30 minutes. Remove from the oven and serve warm or at room temperature.