

Making it Maple

TAPPING INTO THE NATIVE AND NATURAL SWEETNESS OF PA-MADE MAPLE SYRUP.

Alyssa Thayer

IT'S FEBRUARY, WHICH MEANS MOST OF US ARE HOLED up in hibernation, but not the Dewees family. For these first-generation sugarmakers, it's showtime. Kyle and Sara Dewees are the dynamic pair behind **Whiskey Hollow Maple**, specializing in PA-produced maple syrup and other maple products.

Often, maple sugaring practices are passed down from one generation to the next, but this wasn't the case for Kyle and Sara Dewees. They found their way into the business through curiosity and an appreciation for the outdoors. "We fell into it. It wasn't our ultimate plan," says Kyle, remembering the first time they tried tapping maples on his parents' property as an experiment.

Those first taps were all it took—they were hooked. "That first year we made syrup and then went on a tour of sugar houses all across Pennsylvania," says Sara. They leased Kyle's parents' property to start and two years later (in 2018) bought their own sugar bush—140 acres of maple woods in Bradford County, PA.

Although Whiskey Hollow got off to a modest start, the Dewees now have over 3,400 taps. Sara puts this in perspective saying "This may sound like a lot, but you go into Vermont and it's in the tens of thousands."

Once they had the collection and boiling process down, the Dewees continued their experimentation. "We always have something brewing in the kitchen," Sara laughs. They played with infusing flavors and heating to different temperatures. "It is amazing what you can do with it,"



Whiskey Hollow Maple is truly a family business and the Dewees parents involve their kids whenever possible!

says Kyle. "You start with syrup, boil it down further, and you can make maple cream and even granulated sugar."

One of the most creative and delicious innovations is their partnership with Manatawny Still Works Distillery. They age their syrups in old whiskey and rum barrels for a year, during which time the complex flavors of the barrel are drawn into the syrup. Manatawny then closes the loop, taking the barrels back to create maple whiskey.

Four years into their maple enterprise and the Dewees are as committed as ever. They spend their summer and fall looking at equipment and planning. "We hope to go up to eight thousand taps in the next two years," Sara says proudly.

Their extensive line of maple products are sold online, at farmers markets and various shops around the region. They are excited to see folks starting to think about maple as more than just a pancake or waffle topping. Check out the recipes in this article that showcase a few of its seemingly endless uses. Then try them yourself!



Kyle and daughter, Adley, plumbing some sap tanks and prepping for the winter season.

Recipes

Think of the maple-biliites: the rich and earthy sweetness of maple syrup lends itself to almost any sweet or savory application. Use the dishes below as a jumping off point and then continue to play and experiment to find your own favorite maple recipes.

Granola

Yes, you are being challenged to think outside the pancake, but there are still many ways to incorporate maple into your favorite breakfast. Try this wholesome and delicious granola sprinkled over yogurt, drenched in milk, or by the handful.



- 3 C. rolled oats
- 1 C. chopped nuts (can be a combination of cashews, almonds, pumpkin seeds) *unsalted, or less on salt quantity below to compensate
- ½ C. shredded or flaked coconut
- 1 tsp. cinnamon
- ½ tsp. sea salt
- ⅔ C. coconut oil
- 1 tsp. vanilla
- ½ C. maple syrup
- *optional ½ C. nutritional seeds (chia or hemp) added to dry ingredients in beginning
- *optional ½ C. dried fruit or chocolate chips, added at the end, after baking

Preheat oven to 325°F. In a large bowl, add together all dry ingredients (oats, nuts, coconut, cinnamon, salt) and set aside.

In a saucepan, melt coconut oil over low heat, add in vanilla and maple syrup and stir—it will stay separated and that's OK.

Pour melted oil mixture over oats and stir until everything is well coated. Transfer wet oat mix onto baking sheet (parchment paper recommended) in a thin layer.

*Note: often this recipe is too much for just one tray—better to do 2 trays or multiple batches if possible.

Bake for 18–20 minutes, keeping an eye on the edges to make sure they do not burn. Pull tray(s) out and mix/rearrange into thin layer about halfway through.

Much About Maple

Fun facts and tips about this amber-colored nectar of the trees:

Tap on: The process of tapping (if done correctly) does not hurt the tree. It siphons off only a small percentage of the sap and the tree heals easily from the hole.

It's Native: Although maples are native to PA, the cooler northern climates are more conducive for tapping. The highest producing county in PA can be found in the west of the state—Somerset County, which benefits from a high elevation.

Spring Sap: Maple sap naturally begins to flow in the spring. Above freezing days and below freezing nights create pressure that prompts the sap flow.

Better Sweets: As far as sweeteners go, maple syrup is a cut above the rest. It's naturally high in minerals and antioxidants and is lower on the glycemic index than honey or cane sugar.

Go Pure: Grocery aisles are full of maple mimics that have nothing to do with trees. The Dewees do an activity in schools comparing ingredients of real maple syrup and generic syrup. No surprise, the kids can't read or pronounce the ingredients in the fake stuff.

Good Grades: Due to changes in the way maple is graded, most of the maple syrups we see on grocery shelves are now lumped into grade A. When it comes to taste, the most important property is color: A light amber color (formerly fancy grade) is more delicate in color and comes from the first taps of the season, while medium amber and darker colored syrup have a more robust flavor and are produced later in the season.

Keep It Cool: Sealed maple syrup has a very long shelf life (read decades). Once the seal is broken, keep it in the fridge or freezer. Sap is a natural antifreeze for maple trees, so even in a freezer, it will not freeze solid.

Universal Use: The uses for maple are endless, and include slow-roasting veggies, marinating meats, mixing into hot sauce and even stirring into your Happy Hour Old Fashioned. Granulated maple sugar can be substituted evenly for cane sugar in baking recipes!

See recipes for more culinary inspiration.

*Note: Depending on your oven, you may need to turn down the temperature to 300°F if edges start to burn too quickly, or if using multiple trays or thicker layered granola. On the other hand, baking time could take up to 25–30 minutes before granola is nicely browned.

Cool completely before storing in an air-tight container. Makes 4–6 servings.

Maple-Glazed Salmon

This recipe makes my toddlers eat salmon like it's candy—the sweet of the maple and the salt of the soy combine for the perfect bite!

6 salmon fillet portions—could be used for one large salmon fillet as well.

1 Tb. olive oil

For the Sauce:

- 3 Tb. maple syrup
- 2 Tb. soy sauce (for gluten free, use tamari)
- 1 garlic clove, finely minced
- 1 tsp. Dijon mustard



Pull salmon out of the fridge and blot dry and place onto a plate. (Bringing it close to room temperature allows for a more even cooking process, even 10–15 minutes helps.) Preheat oven to 425°F.

Whisk together all sauce ingredients and set aside.

Pour olive oil into the bottom of the roasting pan and swirl around to coat. Arrange salmon portions skin-side-down in the pan, making sure there is space between the fillets. Spoon sauce over each salmon. (*Note: this is a little runny, so do your best to get it to stay on the top of the salmon. Feel free to spoon any mixture that runs off back over top of the salmon.)

Roast until it's cooked through, approximately 12–18 minutes. General rule for salmon is 5 minutes per ½ inch of thickness.

Take out of the oven and transfer to a plate to rest for 10 minutes before serving.

Enjoy warm!

Makes 4–6 servings.

Maple Butternut Squash Soup

There is perhaps nothing as cozy as a steaming bowl of squash soup on a frigid winter's evening. Best enjoyed with a hunk of crusty bread and roasted nuts sprinkled over top.

- 1 butternut squash (yields approximately 2 cups of roasted squash)
- 3 Tb. olive oil
- 1 C. water
- ¾ C. onion, diced (about ½ a medium onion)
- 2 large cloves garlic, minced
- Salt to taste
- 1 Tb. butter
- ½ C. pear, chopped
- 2 C. vegetable broth, or chicken broth
- 2 Tb. maple syrup

Preheat oven to 400°F. Using a sharp and sturdy knife, carefully slice your squash in half lengthwise and scoop out the seeds and pulp.

Pour 1 tablespoon of olive oil and ½ cup of water into the bottom of a large roasting pan, then place your squash pieces cut-side down in the pan. Roast for 50–60 minutes, until the flesh is extremely soft (should squish down easily when you press on the outside of the peel.)

*Note: don't worry if skin browns, you'll be peeling that off.

Take squash out of the oven and carefully place flesh side up to cool.

Using a thick-bottom large pot (a Dutch oven works great), heat the remaining 2 tablespoons of oil. Over medium-high heat, saute onions until softened and brown (approximately 5 minutes).

Turn heat down to medium and add minced garlic and a generous pinch of salt. Stir in until fragrant (about 30 seconds). Add butter and let stand until melted. Turn the heat down to medium-low and add chopped pear and saute until the pear is soft and browned (approximately 10 minutes).

When butternut squash is cool enough to handle, scoop out the flesh of both halves into your pot. Add broth and bring back up to a simmer for 10–15 minutes (long enough to meld the flavors and take the rawness off of the broth).

Turn off heat and stir in maple syrup. Once the soup has cooled slightly, transfer to a blender. Blend on high until smooth silky texture is achieved.

*Note: you can also use an immersion blender for this.

Serve right away, or put back into the pot and keep it on very low to make sure it's warm for serving.

*Note: the amount of broth will depend on how thick you like your soups—if you like them to be a thicker puree, you might start with just 1 cup of broth. You can blend and return to pot and add more broth if it's too thick for you. Remember to simmer it a bit before serving.

Makes 6 servings.

Maple & Rosemary Toasted Walnuts

Sweet, salty and herbal flavors intertwine in this addictive crowd-pleaser. Best enjoyed atop soups and salads.



It's important to Kyle and Sara Dewees that their products are as transparent as possible, so they bottle in clear glass and only infuse with ingredients you can see—like vanilla bean and cinnamon sticks.

- 2 C. walnut halves and pieces
- 1 fresh rosemary sprig, finely minced
- 1 Tb. butter (unsalted or salted works fine, just account for saltiness at the end)

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- 2 Tb. maple syrup
- ¼ tsp. sea salt

Prepare a large cookie sheet with parchment paper and set aside. In a small bowl, combine walnuts and rosemary and set aside.

Melt butter in a saucepan over low heat. Once melted, mix in maple syrup and pour over nuts. Mix well to evenly coat walnuts.

Arrange onto the prepared cookie sheet, spreading the nuts out into one single layer. Sprinkle evenly with sea salt.

Bake for 5 minutes, give them a quick stir and then place them back in the oven for an additional 5–7 minutes (until rosemary is fragrant and nuts are golden brown).

Allow to cool completely and place into an airtight container to store.

Makes about 2 cups.

*Note: Depending on the type of butter used, an extra pinch of salt after baking may be needed. ♦

Alyssa Thayer found her love of food at an early age, frolicking around her mother's organic farm and eating her weight in berries and snap peas each summer. She is a self-proclaimed urban farm girl, whose mission is to bring inspired ideas to life, passionate people together, and good food to every table.



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