

How the Indians Got Maple Sugar

One day Wenebojo was standing under a maple tree. Suddenly it began to rain maple syrup-not sap-right on top of him. Wenebojo got a birchbark tray and held it out to catch the syrup. He said to himself: "This is too easy for the Indians to have the syrup just rain down like this." So he threw the syrup away and decided that before they could have the syrup, the Indians would have to give a feast, offer tobacco, speak to the manido, and put out some birchbark trays.

Nokomis, the grandmother of Wenebojo, showed him how to insert a small piece of wood into each maple tree so the sap could run down into the vessels beneath. When Manabush tested it, it was thick and sweet. He told his grandmother it would never do to give the Indians the syrup without making them work for it. He climbed to the top of one of the maples, scattered rain over all the trees, dissolving the sugar as it flowed into the birchbark vessels. Now the Indians have to cut wood, make vessels, collect the sap and boil it for a long time. If they want the maple syrup, they have to work hard for it.

(Adapted from Robert E. Ritzenthaler and Pat Ritzenthaler, 1983, *The Woodland Indians of the Western Great Lakes*, Prospect Heights IL: Waveland Press.)





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