

Maple Weekend

Sweet Ontario

PURE MAPLE SYRUP



FIRST
Weekend
of April

Maple Weekend Guide For Host Sites

How to make the most of
your Maple Weekend



Sweet Ontario

PURE MAPLE SYRUP

ONTARIO MAPLE SYRUP PRODUCERS' ASSOCIATION

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WHAT IS MAPLE WEEKEND?

The Ontario Maple Syrup Producers' Association (OMSPA) hosts the Ontario Maple Weekend the first weekend in April every year. All OMSPA members are invited to participate in this annual event which started in 2015 and has quickly spread province wide. It is a collective effort of OMSPA and our members in order to provide individual producers with increased market presence and to promote the sale of locally produced Ontario maple syrup products.

Maple Weekend is a great opportunity for consumers to get up close to a local maple syrup producer and see first-hand how maple syrup is made, from tree to table. Maple Weekend showcases to the various elements of maple syrup production, and other value-added maple products through free demonstrations so visitors can experience the tastes and smells of fresh maple syrup.

Participating producers are found across the province, where producers open their doors, to give consumers an opportunity to learn more about the craft of maple sugar making. Producers are expected to provide visitors with an opportunity to learn more about the traditions of maple sugaring, along with an opportunity to taste why pure Ontario maple syrup has long been a favourite springtime treat.

All participating Maple producers must be a current member of the Ontario Maple Syrup Producers' Association in order to participate each year in this event. Please visit the website at www.omspa.ca for information on how to join OMSPA.





WHY PARTICIPATE IN MAPLE WEEKEND?

Maple Weekend is an excellent, low-cost opportunity to increase market-share and sell more syrup and related products, on-farm. It's also a good way to connect with the community, and establish a network of loyal purchasers. Each year OMSPA earmarks funds to market Maple Weekend across the province, this is free advertising for your business!

Here's how you can benefit from participating in Maple Weekend:

1. Maple Weekend customers/consumers are better informed about how your products are made and the real local and natural character of your products.
2. A positive visit to your maple operation can build great customer loyalty.
3. Customers get to know you and your staff/family.
4. You get to know your customers and learn more about their interests and questions.
5. Customers learn how to find and buy your maple products.
6. You don't have to transport your products to remote locations: markets and fairs to get sales, you can do so right on the farm.
7. You can sell your products at retail sale prices.





HOW TO APPLY TO PARTICIPATE IN MAPLE WEEKEND

Participation in Maple Weekend is open to all current members of OMSPA for a fee.

If you are interested in participating in the Maple Weekend, please confirm your participation by contacting your Local representative.

For those that are participating for the first time, please submit to your Local representative the following:

1. Participant profile: This describes you and your sugar operation and any activities that will be going on during the two days at your bush. For examples please visit www.mapleweekend.ca
2. Send your description, high-resolution photos(4), and GPS coordinates
3. Fee for the event per participant is \$1___ which can be mailed to your Local. Cheque should be made payable to Local group. Alternatively, some Locals accept e-transfers.

For those who have participated in prior years:

We have found that the profile changes to reoccurring participants are minimal year after year. If this is the case for you, please consider reviewing your profile now.

1. Visit the website and confirm text & photos in profile, your location on the map on your profile page, and your location on the “Find sugar producers by map” page.
2. Send any changes to your local Maple Weekend representative. Be sure to provide GPS coordinates for updates to locations.
3. Fee for the event per participant is \$___ which can be mailed to your Local representative. Cheque should be made payable to your Local group. Alternatively some Locals accept E-Transfers.

All profiles and money must be submitted by **November** to your Local representative.

THIS IS THE TIME FOR YOU TO THINK ABOUT WHAT YOU WILL BE OFFERING ON MAPLE WEEKEND – IF WE DON’T KNOW WHAT YOU’RE OFFERING, WE CAN’T PROMOTE YOUR DESTINATION PROPERLY!

WHAT IS EXPECTED THAT MAPLE WEEKEND HOST SITES PROVIDE FOR VISITORS?

- **Be Open!** When the weekend arrives **BE OPEN**, even if the weather is unfavourable. Customers may still come and may come from a distance just to see your site, so please don't disappoint them.
- By agreeing to host, you agree that you will do everything you can to present the making of maple syrup in a safe, clean, pleasant and family friendly environment.
- **NO ALCOHOL** should be consumed or visible at any time during the public hours.
- Demonstrate some aspect of production. You **MUST** have at least one engaging display or demonstrations at your farm during Maple Weekend. Providing an interactive experience for visitors is always a crowd pleaser; boiling maple syrup, stirring maple cream or making maple sugar. Put some thought into what would be appealing for the visitor. Identify what you will be offering the visitor well before Maple Weekend, and then **DELIVER THAT EXPERIENCE**.
- People love to **EAT**. Be sure you have plenty of samples of your product. If you can have maple themed food for sale this is always popular.

TIPS FOR HOSTING A SUCCESSFUL MAPLE WEEKEND

A successful Maple Weekend is a wonderful experience for both the visitor and the producer. A successful experience can mean excellent sales, happy customers, and an expanded knowledge base about what is special about Ontario maple syrup.

There are many things a producer can do to enhance the experience for visitors. It is not enough to offer the same experiences as are available all season, Maple Weekend activities should be enhanced and expanded to offer the visitor a compelling reason to visit your sugarbush on that particular weekend.

Remember that planning for a successful event begins long before the sap starts to flow, and Maple Weekend takes place. Spread your planning activities throughout the year to lead to the best possible Maple Weekend experience for you and your guests. OMSPA begins marketing Maple Weekend in January, if you don't know what you will be offering your visitors at that point, you could miss out on free marketing initiatives.

PLEASE REFER TO THE MAPLE WEEKEND CALENDAR IN THE APPENDIX FOR A TEMPLATE.



WHAT SHOULD MAPLE WEEKEND HOST SITES DO FOR THEIR BUSINESS INTEGRITY?

- As an OMSPA member participating in the Maple Weekend, your business has general liability insurance coverage.
- Check with your health department - do you need a permit for the sampling you are doing? If you are preparing food on-site this is especially important.
- Make sure to provide a reliable contact telephone/cell phone number with voice mail and email address that you will check for messages. Replying to inquiries quickly will make happy customers and improve your business reputation.
- Put caution signs and temporary barriers around hot parts of your evaporator to keep children away.
- Read and follow the guidelines in the manual "Recommended Food Safe Best Practices for Producing Maple Syrup in New York State." <http://sugarmakers.nysmaple.com/nys-grown-certified-for-maple-syrup/>

USING MAPLE WEEKEND TO INCREASE AND BUILD YOUR CUSTOMER BASE

Maple Weekend is an excellent opportunity to gather information about your customers, to use for future events and activities. Key to this is to ensure your visitors have a POSITIVE experience, one they will remember in future years when it comes time to visit a sugarbush again.

Here are a few activities you can undertake to ensure a happy, satisfied customer:

- Offer tours of your maple operation with signage at a start and end location with set times. End the tours near the sales display.
- Offer a wide variety of maple products in attractive packages. Goes without saying everything should be clean and neat!
- Display your logo wherever possible. Use OMSPA logo as well.
- Provide tasting sample of syrup and a selection of your products. Provide suggestions on uses of maple in the kitchen on a daily basis.
- Add maple coffee and tea to your product list. You may have visitors who for health reasons must avoid sugar, but the coffee and tea may fit their health restrictions.
- Provide items to take home. Business cards, recipes with your logo on it, pens, magnets.
- Keep a clipboard at the cash where visitors can sign up to receive more information. This list should include email addresses that you can use to keep in touch.
- Collect addresses with postal codes, then later you can identify where your market is originating, and focus on the postal code areas with the most results to develop a marketing campaign.
- Thank your customers whenever possible - at the sugar house, in a follow - up email on social media, in a follow-up mailing with a promotion attached



MAKE THE MOST OF YOUR MAPLE WEEKEND WITH THESE FUN IDEAS!

- Serve maple-inspired dishes like a pancake breakfast or other maple-based food for sale at your site will attract many more participants. Be creative! Be sure you have appropriate permits for serving food, through your local Health Department.
- Coordinate wagon, sleigh or pony rides, drawn either by either horses or tractor. Make sure your vehicle is appropriate with seating and safety rails and entry steps and exit steps and a mature driver are necessary. Have well identified starting and stopping locations with waiting area well marked and separate from the ride's travel lanes.
- Invite groups with interesting activities for interactive displays such as birds of prey rehabilitators, reptile clubs, horse clubs.
- Stickers for children, such as "I love Ontario Maple". Sweet Ontario stickers at OMSPA store.
- Have a display that displays nutrition and health positives of maple syrup
- Raffles or door prize - these can be used to obtain names, email addresses
- Historical displays of equipment or history-based photos or artwork



Tours

Guided & self-guided tours, scavenger hunts, hiking paths



Demos

Product demonstrations, ie. Tapping, historical & small scale boiling, sawmill & wood processor demo



Entertainment

Product demonstrations, ie. Tapping, historical & small scale boiling, sawmill & wood processor demo



Games

Simple game of skill, colouring contest, Silent auction, recipe cards or maple colouring book



Displays

Old tractor, old truck, old cars on display, Arts and crafts vendors

AMPLIFY YOUR MAPLE WEEKEND THROUGH PARTNERSHIPS

- Use your memberships in, and relationships with, various local organizations to promote your maple weekend.
- Sponsor a charity event: Local fire departments, churches, boy scouts troops etc. often will hold pancake breakfast or some fundraiser linked to Maple Weekend. You provide the syrup, you are the sponsor of the event - just make sure your name is in their ad.
- Sponsor a school class: If you have kids or grandkids in a local school, offer to come in and teach their classes about maple. Kids that experience maple remember this as adults.
- Cross promotion with other locations that sell your product: Advertise jointly in the paper and on social media, encourage your partner locations to offer maple menus, maple promotions, and feature their local producer. Reach out to a local restaurant to feature maple on their menu, at least for Maple Weekend days. Maybe you will turn it into a year - round account that will continue to stimulate maple sales!
- Hotels: April is often a slow time for hotels and motels. They welcome something to promote locally to stimulate visitors in the slow times. Take a poster, rack cards to be put on display.
- Pancake breakfasts: Serving a pancake breakfast at your site will attract many more participants. You can do this with your own staff or by hosting a local charity. Make sure you have appropriate permits from your local authority.
- Wineries, cideries, breweries: many of these are making beverages that contain maple now. Host a tasting at your sugar house.
- Other sugar houses nearby: Combine funds to pay for a larger ad. You may use Maple Weekend graphics as needed. You can encourage "Maple Weekending!"
- Organize a gift basket drawing or stamp treasure hunt.

MAPLE PRODUCT IDEAS FOR SAMPLE OR SALE

Please note: check with your health department for guidelines for the sale of maple value-added products.

- | | | |
|------------------------|--------------------|--------------------------|
| • Maple syrup | • Maple cookies | • Granulated maple syrup |
| • Maple popcorn | • Maple rock candy | • Maple coated nuts |
| • Maple straws | • Fresh sap | • Maple suckers |
| • Maple soda | • Maple tea | • Maple lemonade |
| • Maple coffee | • Maple on snow | • Maple marshmallow |
| • Maple cotton candy | • Maple slushies | • Maple meringues |
| • Maple taffy | • Maple fudge | • Maple brittle |
| • Maple mustard | • Maple milkshake | • Maple cream wafer |
| • Maple salad dressing | • Soft sugar candy | |

FIVE DOS FOR YOUR SOCIAL MEDIA BUSINESS PAGE

Social Media is a wonderful way to reach your audience, especially if you use it to its full capacity. One of the many benefits of social media is the number of people you capture; an astounding number of people are engaging with some type of social media platform (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram etc.) every day.

- Start off on the right foot: Make sure your page is a business page, not a personal page.
- Content is key: make your posts interesting, relevant and fun! Be sure there is a healthy mixture of business and fun information like recipes, fun facts, and original photos. Videos are a must. Just remember to hold your phone/camera horizontally
- Post daily: The more often you are in front of your audience, the better! Be sure your posts are meaningful/relevant, to keep fans engaged.
- Monitor your page: Check and respond accordingly to comments, messages and visitor posts on your page.
- Be a social butterfly: The more you engage posts from other pages or people, the more exposure your page will get!

Don't forget to like and follow our social pages @ontariomaplesyrup

#ONTARIOMAPLEWEEKEND

#ONTARIOMAPLE #SWEETONTARIO



SPREADING THE WORD TO POTENTIAL VISITORS

- Use the names in your previous yearbook/gift entry/feedback cards to create a customer service mailing list that you then use to send emails or postcards inviting them to come again.
- Take out additional advertising to bring attention to your event. Visitors generally will go to the sugar house they have heard of most. It's your job to make sure they have heard of yours.
- Put your info on the postcards and leave stacks at your retail locations. Hand them out wherever you go. People want to feel personally invited.
- Place the Maple weekend posters at your retail locations and community bulletin boards.
- Get free advertising by inviting local reporters from newspapers, local radio, and local television to visit your site.
- Enter your event on local online community calendars.
- Put out notices on your webpage, Facebook

REMEMBER: TAKE LOTS OF PICTURES!

Keep a camera with you at all times during the maple weekend or assign someone to be the photographer for the day. Videos are within the reach of anyone who has a smart phone and are very effective. They can be used on social media, on your website, in your print media and in your ads. Having a photo record of these “golden days” in your sugar house can be priceless.

One caution - photos that have a recognizable face, particularly of a child, should not be used for advertising unless you get the individual's permission. Keep a model release form on hand for visitors to sign. These can be downloaded easily from the Internet.



MEASURING SUCCESS

Measuring your success is helpful for you to develop your own business promotion plan for the following year to better reach your goals for attendance and participation.

For next year this data will help you plan how much to stock, whether you need additional staff, what products to demonstrate and sample, what activities are crowd pleasers. Be prepared to report trends and comparisons with previous years to OMSPA.

Grants to assist in advertising and promotion of the event will require statistics to back the proposal.

WHAT DO YOU NEED TO MEASURE?

Traffic

- A) How many people came?
- B) What did they enjoy the best?
- C) How did they hear about you?
- D) Did you capture their contact information to generate repeat business?
- E) Areas for improvement?

Social Media is a wonderful way to reach your audience, especially if you use it to its full capacity. One of the many benefits of social media is the number of people you capture; an astounding number of people are engaging with some type of social media platform (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram etc.) every day.

How to collect:

1. Get a manual clicker, counter and have someone near the entrance count the visitors each time someone comes through the door.
2. Guest book: This should be in a prominent location and is especially effective if it is near a staff person who will encourage people to sign. Be sure to ask for their email addresses and mailing address with postal codes.
3. Provide a gift contest or promotion where entries require name, address and phone number or email.

Sales

- A) What were your total sales?
- B) What products sold best?
- C) Did anyone request a product you didn't have?

How to collect:

1. Provide suggestion or feedback forms
2. Take beginning and end inventory of each product that you sell.
3. Write down the total amount sold each day and keep these totals from year to year for comparison.

TIMELINE FOR BUILDING A MARKETING STRATEGY

Timeline for building a marketing strategy

1. Confirm participation in Maple Weekend. Decide what you will be offering over the weekend and complete and submit your Maple Weekend write up, pictures and fee to your Local representative.

January: Get ready

1. Plan your purchases for promotional supplies such as colouring books, posters, post cards, maple coffee, maple tea etc.

February: Market!

1. Submit requests to local community calendars (radio stations, local calendars in newspapers, online sites)
2. Invite media for a sugar house visit before or during the weekend.
3. Line up extra staff and volunteers
4. Submit health permits for the weekend.
5. Check your listing on OMSPA's website: Maple Weekend www.mapleweekend.ca
6. If you use social media, start promoting your sugar house with pictures. Follow us on Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook!

March: Clean everything

1. Keep updating your social media site
2. Purchase needed supplies for meals, maple and demonstrations
3. Send out post cards and email invite.
4. Post banner on road in a prominent location
5. Review the check list on the next page the day before opening

April: Clean again!!

1. Set up road signs - watch out for snow plows!
2. Be open for visitors
3. Have everything and everyone ready for the weekend
4. Have fun and enjoy the day!



APPENDIX

MAPLE WEEKEND PLANNING CALENDAR:

March - one year away:

If you participated in maple weekend, immediately following the event is best to decide if you will plan to participate the following year. Have a meeting with your staff/family and volunteers and openly discuss what went well and areas that need to be improved. Begin a list of ideas that might work at your site.

Put together your calendar of what needs to be done and when and who will be responsible to accomplish it.

Put together a Maple Weekend marketing plan (see later in this appendix).

If you did not participate in the Maple Weekend visit some other farms that have a history of participating to ask questions and learn.

1. Post next year's dates in your sugarhouse and have signs at other points of sale or contact
2. Post next year's dates on your website and Facebook pages or other social media you use
3. Create a list of physical upgrades your facility needs in order to be ready for the next maple weekend.

For example: parking improvements, new equipment needed, cash register, sugar house appearance upgrades, signage, fire extinguishers, porta-potty etc.

June:

Check out workshops that will provide training for making new value-added products, or social media workshops.

September:

Make arrangements with outside organizations and partnerships that may be doing food sale or assisting in other ways.



MAPLE WEEKEND DAILY CHECKLIST

- ☐ Good road signs and directions are necessary to be sure people don't become frustrated trying to find your site. Be sure your signs comply with local highway law.
- ☐ Safe walkways - get participants out of the mud with straw or chips, if ice or snow is still around, shovel and salt walkways and driveways.
- ☐ Adequate parking, traffic cones, good directional signs or a parking attendant are very helpful.
- ☐ Washroom/porta - potty, good signage is helpful and they need to be kept clean & stocked with supplies.
- ☐ Is there a marked exit to the building? Do you have a phone to call 911 and a first aid kit if there is an emergency?
- ☐ Make sure all displays are clean, well-lit and attractive to the eye
- ☐ Sanitary gloves and hair control for anyone demonstrating value added products or in any way handling products or samples.
- ☐ Have the same hats or shirts for all helpers so visitors can identify who is part of your crew
- ☐ Make sure the crew is clean and neat!
- ☐ Capacity, try your best to provide space for visitors to be comfortable, not to have to stand in line for extended times, room to see demonstrations, somewhere to get out of the nasty weather conditions. Is there a chair or bench for someone to sit if they are tired?
- ☐ We can't say it enough - **make sure everything is CLEAN!!**

MAPLE WEEKEND MARKETING & EDUCATIONAL PLAN

1. Maple Weekend goals: list what you would like to accomplish by participating in Maple Weekend.
2. Brainstorm and generate ideas for the event.

Work sheet: Brainstorm education and marketing options you could include at your site:

- A. _____
- B. _____
- C. _____
- D. _____
- E. _____

3. Analysis sheet for every option do a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats Analysis: (SWOT)

SWOT Analysis Sheet:

Questions or Options: _____

Strengths:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

Weaknesses:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

Opportunities:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

Threats:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

4. Maple Weekend Action Options, based on the results of the SWOT analysis decide and list what you would likely do and most likely not do.



MAPLE WEEKEND ACTION PLAN:

Questions or Options: _____

I will (begin or continue):

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

I will not:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

5. Financial Feasibility Evaluation, do a brief financial feasibility evaluation of each “**I will**”.

If the evaluation comes out negative or not positive enough, move the option to the “I will not “.

It is helpful to know what you will not do and why as well as the plan to do so you cannot be easily distracted by last minute pressures.

Maple Weekend Action Feasibility Analysis

Action: _____

Costs:

Returns:

Total Costs:

Total return:

Total:

6. Written Education and Marketing plan: assemble your list of what you have evaluated and decided you will do with the costs, needed supplies and actions necessary to make it happen, list who will be responsible to get the idea in place and when and who will staff it on the Weekend.

Once you have written this information down for what you have decided to do, you have your written education and marketing plan and add this plan to your Maple Weekend and Business Plan.

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For More Information:

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