

Maple's Moment

From scrambled eggs to side salads, a guide to all the marvelous places the golden syrup can go.



Martin Ramin for The Wall Street Journal, Food Styling by Karen Evans

TAP DANCE Poached pear shines atop a bacon-flecked maple pool.

Thanks to the historic lashings of snow that hit the Northeast this winter, we're poised, pancakes stacked, for what's likely to be a banner year in maple production. Icy nights and warmer days are essential to a good syrup season—the end-of-winter rhythm of freeze and thaw coaxes sap from the trees for as long as they can resist the urge to bud, usually four to six weeks. Last year overheated prematurely, leaving some producers with a maple bust. But it's been a snowy season, and chances are good that the sugar bush (as tapping areas are cheerily called) will stay chilled and the sweet sap will flow.

With a glut of nature's most bewitching sweetener headed our way, it's high time to break maple out of its brunch hour rut. Under that sticky toffee veneer are layers of smoke and tannin that play just as well at dinner or cocktail hour. In search of a few unexpected ways to use the spoils, we turned to chefs across the Northeast.

—Kristen Miglore

The Salad Dressing

Maple can be a powerful supporting seasoning in a salad dressing. Chef Tony Maws at Boston's Craigie on Main considers it a "smoky, almost sinister substitute for honey" in a

vinaigrette, and has also been known to simmer it with cider vinegar and sage for a sweet-sour gastrique for pan-roasted sweetbreads.

Ice Cream Topping

At her restaurant Prune in New York, chef Gabrielle Hamilton serves butter pecan ice cream "drowned" in a pool of syrup, finished with a shower of coarse salt—a step up from the childhood treat of maple poured over fresh snow.

The Poacher

Anything is better cooked in a hot maple bath. At Montreal's Au Pied de Cochon, biscuit dough is poached in maple syrup and cream for pudding chômeur and lightly scrambled eggs are simmered in maple, then piled on a buckwheat crepe with sliced fingerling potatoes and seared foie gras.

Latin-Style

Lee Duberman, the chef at Ariel's in Brookfield, Vt., has found that maple syrup bears a strong resemblance to Mexican piloncillo sugar: "It adds a lovely dimension to moles and classic tacos al pastor."

The Cure-All

Everything from duck breast to pigs' feet, it seems, can be improved after a long soak in maple and salt. At Michael's on the Hill in Waterbury Center, Vt., trout that's been steeped in a maple brine—along with aromatics like fennel, celery leaves and caraway—is then smoked over maple chips and served with horseradish crème fraîche.