## life

# **Spring A Sweet Season That Sets The Tone At Breakfast BY LEE SVITAK DEAN**

© 2013 Star Tribune (Minneapolis)

MINNEAPOLIS — When the nights are below freezing and the days are in the 40s, you'll find Teresa Marrone checking on two maple trees on her south Minneapolis property, watching for the drip-drip-drip of the sap flow-

ing. "I'm known as the crazy lady in the neighborhood who taps trees in the front yard," Marrone said with a laugh.

Not surprisingly, she has found many uses for this sweet liquid, which she describes in a new book, "Modern Maple," the second in the Northern Plate series by the Minnesota Historical Society Press (168 pages, \$16.95) From grilled radicchio with a maple glaze to mulled maple apple cider and maple chicken wings, Marrone offers 75 recipes to please our palates.

A longtime forager, Marrone has written several books on wild foods, including "Cooking With Wild Berries and Fruits of Minnesota, Wisconsin and Michigan," and "Abundantly Wild: Collecting and Cooking Wild Edibles in the Upper Midwest.

The sap for maple syrup comes from a tiny — and very hardy - part of the world, where there is just the right freeze-thaw cycle and where certain types of maples grow. Not surprisingly, that includes Minnesota, the state farthest west for maple syrup production. We produce only small quantities (less than 1 percent of U.S. production). The bulk of the remaining U.S. production comes from the Northeast, with Vermont and New York yielding more than half of the U.S. supply. Most maple syrup (80 percent) comes from a small swath of Canada, particularly in Quebec.

In Minnesota there are only two major commercial syrup producers — Wild Country Maple Products and Caribou Cream, both of Lutsen, Minn. — though smaller processors and hobbyists offer a limited, very local product.

One maple syrup doesn't necessarily taste like another. "We're beginning to understand that syrup has terroir," said Marrone. That's the notion that environment — the soil, the altitude or air, and more — affects the flavor of a food. The term is often used when describing wine or cheese and other foods, including honey. Both Wild Country and Caribou Cream have won national awards for their syrup, beating out the biggies in the field with their flavors.

"What's amazing is that the two syrups (from Up North) taste different from each other," said Marrone. Large commercial producers, such as those in the Northeast, often blend their supplies of maple sap, which results in a uniform flavor that lessens the effect of terroir. American Indians used maple flavoring — sap, syrup and sugar - as a primary seasoning long before they had access to salt. It still serves a role beyond cooking. "Maple is more than an important foodstuff to Ojibwe and other indigenous peoples of the area. It remains essential as the first harvest of spring, the lifesaving gift of the creator, the blessed substance that once broke the fast of winter's starvation," said Heid Erdrich, a Minneapolis writer at work on a book of indigenous food stories and recipes. "Maple sap is also an icon in Ojibwe stories that connects to women and our roles as lifebringers and protectors of the waters of the Earth. This time of year in the Ojibwe calendar is called Iskigamiige-giizis, or Maple Sugar Moon," said Erdrich. The buckets, spigots, plastic bags and tubing used in tapping maple trees are just the first step for producing the gooey substance that transforms pancakes into puddles of delight. Once the clear, mildly sweet liquid is retrieved from maples, it's off to the outdoor cooker to boil off the water - and the sooner the better for the best results. Instead of a kettle, Marrone fires up a turkey fryer in her yard to cook away the water in the sap. The process, which creates a tremendous amount of steam, transforms what initially is 2 percent sugar in the sap into the 66

percent sugar that syrup has. The final step — "when it's brought down to a respectable volume," Marrone said — takes place on her stovetop, where she cooks off even more water.

For the hobbyist, it's a labor of love. A single gallon of maple syrup comes from 40 gallons of sap.

Color determines the grade of maple syrup. Consumers will find forms of Grade A at the supermarket, from Light Amber (the first sap of the season) to Medium and Dark Amber. Some cooks today reach for the Grade B variety, which is a very dark syrup that results from being tapped further along in the season. Once used exclusively in commercial products, Grade B's strong flavor — twice as much as Grade A — is favored by some bakers and cooks. (Trader Joe's carries it, as do some other stores)

If the only way you've tried maple syrup — and we're talking about the real stuff, not the colored corn syrup that's sold as "imitation" — is on pancakes and French toast, you have some discovering to do. As Marrone found, maple syrup works well as a flavoring agent with a variety of spices and herbs (cumin, sage and thyme, among them) and it has a niche in savory dishes, as well as the more predictable sweet ones.

#### **COOKING TIPS AT HOME**

-Maple syrup is sticky, of course, and that makes measuring a bit messy. If you're using oil in the same recipe as syrup, measure the oil first and use the same utensil to measure the syrup, which will slip out of the oil-coated utensil easier than from a clean object.

-If you have some crystallized syrup at the bottom of the jar, don't toss it. This is more likely to happen with small batches from home producers than a commercially made product. "We don't have the same sophisticated equipment as commercial producers," said Marrone. If you can't dig out the crystals, simply put the container in some very hot water and let it sit a bit until it loosens

up. —Never turn your back on syrup that's on the stove. It can burn or boil over quickly, and is both messy and dangerous, since it sticks to you and is hotter than boiling water. "People don't respect it as much as they should," said Marrone. "When you're cooking with it, you need everything in its place — mise en place — before you start."

-Experiment with some unfa-

Spanish sweet paprika. Chile-garlic sauce is available in the Asian section of the supermarket. If your ribs are larger than noted here, they will need a longer cooking time (3-pound racks are more likely to cook for about 2 1/4 hours). From "Modern Maple," by Teresa Marrone.

1/3 c. plus 3/4 c. maple syrup, divided

2 tbsp. sweet paprika, prefer-ably smoked Spanish (see Note) 1 tbsp. freshly ground black pepper

1 1/2 tsp. kosher salt

 $1 \frac{1}{2}$  tsp. onion powder (not onion salt)

/2 tsp. dried thyme leaves 2 racks baby-back ribs (1 3/4

to 2 1/4 lb. per rack) (see Note) 3/4 c. apple juice or water

1/4 c. tomato paste

1/4 c. minced or grated white onion

1 tbsp. Dijon mustard

2 tsp. chile-garlic sauce (see Note)

Directions: To make marinade: In a small bowl, combine 1/3 cup maple syrup, paprika, black pepper, salt, onion powder and thyme. Cut each rack of ribs into 4 pieces; place in a large nonreactive baking dish. Pour marinade over ribs and rub into both sides, distributing it as evenly as you can. Cover dish with plastic wrap and refrigerate at least 4 hours or as long as 8 hours.

For preliminary cooking: Heat oven to 350 degrees. Add about an inch of water to roaster or other large baking dish. Place a rack in the roaster, propping it up on balls of foil if necessary to raise it above the water. Stack the ribs on the rack; pour any liquid that has accumulated under the ribs into the roaster. Seal the roaster tightly and bake for  $1 \ 1/2$ hours (see Note). Remove roaster from oven and set lid slightly ajar; let ribs rest for 30 to 40 minutes. while ribs are resting, prepare glaze.

To prepare glaze: Combine 3/4 cup maple syrup, apple juice, tomato paste, onion, mustard and chile-garlic sauce in small nonreactive saucepan. Heat to boiling, adjust heat so mixture boils gently, and cook, stirring occasionally, for about 20 minutes.

Once ribs have rested and glaze is ready, you can proceed directly to grilling or else refrigerate ribs, loosely covered, for up to 12 hours before grilling. Also cool and refrigerate glaze if you are going to wait more than an hour before grilling ribs.

To grill: Prepare grill with direct, medium-intensity fire. Place ribs on grate and cook until hot, turning frequently. Brush generous layer of glaze on the top side of the ribs. Cook for about 2 minutes, then turn ribs over and

brush again with glaze. Continue

need to core and slice some of the second quarter.

In large nonreactive mixing bowl, combine sliced cabbage, onion, vinegar and salt; stir well. Set aside at room temperature to marinate for 25 to 30 minutes, stirring several times. At end of marinating time, fill bowl with cold tap water and swirl cabbage to rinse off salt and vinegar. Pour into wire-mesh strainer and drain, then rinse again; let drain for 5 to 10 minutes.

While cabbage is draining, separate orange into segments. Use your fingers to break each segment into 1/2-inch pieces, holding segment over empty mixing bowl so juices drip into bowl. Add orange pieces to bowl as you go. Add syrup and oil to bowl; stir in mix. Return drained cabbage mixture to bowl; add blueberries and raspberries and stir gently to mix.

Nutrition information per each of 5 servings: Calories 77 Fat 2 g Sodium 150

mg Carbohydrates 15 g Saturated fat 0 g Calcium 41 mg

Protein 1 g Cholesterol 0 mg

Dietary fiber 3 g Diabetic exchanges per serving: 1 vegetable, 1/2 fruit, 1/2 fat.

#### **BROWN COW WITH ROOT BEER AND MAPLE**

Serves 1.

Note: From "Modern Maple," by Teresa Marrone.

1 1/2 tbsp. maple syrup

2 tsp. chocolate sundae syrup 8 oz. (1 c.) chilled top-quality root beer

2 scoops vanilla ice cream Directions: Add maple and chocolate syrups to tall, chilled pint glass. Add about 1/3 cup root beer; stir well with a longhandled spoon. Add a scoop of ice cream and another 1/3 cup root beer; stir slightly. Add another scoop of ice cream; fill glass with root beer and serve immediately with long-handled spoon and a straw.

Nutrition information per serving:

Calories 400 Fat 10 g Sodium 116 mg Sat. fat 6 g Carbs 75 g Calcium 160 mg

Protein 3 g Cholesterol 39 mg Dietary fiber 1 g

Diabetic exchanges per serv ing: 5 other carb, 2 fat.





COURTESY TERESA MARRONE VIA MINNEAPOLIS STAR TRIBUNE/MCT Teresa Marrone is the author of "Modern Maple."



miliar combos with maple as you're cooking. Drizzle maple into your cappuccino or in a malted milk. Infuse bourbon with it or add it to a hot toddy. Roast root vegetables with it or caramelize onions with it. Add it to homemade granola or whip it into butter. "Modern Maple" and Marrone will guide you.

### SPICES, HERBS, EXTRACTS

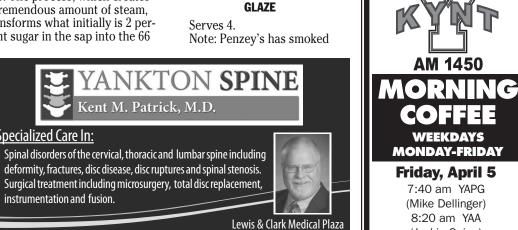
- -Black pepper —Cardamom
- -Cinnamon
- —Cumin

 —Ginger root or powdered ginger

- -Marjoram
- —Nutmeg
- -Rosemary
- -Sage
- —Szechuan pepper
- -Thyme
- —Vanilla
- Fruit
- —Apples —Bananas
- -Blueberries -Dried fruits (cranberries,
- figs, apples, apricots)
- -Mangoes
- -Pears
- —Pineapple
- More choices
- -Butter
- -Chipotle chile pepper
- —Fish (oily, such as salmon)
- –Mustàrď
- -Nuts
- -Onions
- -Pork
- -Root vegetables -Smoked meats (bacon,
- ham)

### **BABY BACK RIBS WITH MAPLE**

Serves 4.



2525 Fox Run Parkway, Suite 200



Cut cabbage into 2 quarters.

Remove core from one quarter

slices. You'll need about 3 cups

sliced cabbage, so you may also

(Jackie Quinn)

and discard, then cut wedge

crosswise into 1/4-inch-wide



605.260.2118

Specialized Care In:

instrumentation and fusion.