

# Birch Syrup

## Farming to Incorporate the Birch Tree

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Canada is known for Maple Syrup, Mounties, Moose, Snowshoes, Inukshuks, Beavers, and Mac Jackets! The question is often asked - **“Why would one make syrup from anything other than Maple?”** The answer is simple - there are no Maple trees that grow naturally in the North Cariboo other than the Douglas Maple which is a small tree or shrub!!



Paper Birch (**Betula papyrifera**) is a common deciduous tree that grows within the North Cariboo. It grows on a variety of soils and sites although it does not grow well in the shade; as such it often occurs in younger forests following disturbances such as fire and /or fire. Unlike Sugar Maple, it is a tree found across much of Canada - not quite coast to coast to coast but pretty close! Here in British Columbia, paper birch grows throughout much of the interior while on the coast, it is found in only a few areas. It is easily identified due to its peeling bark but, to the untrained eye, it can be mistaken for Trembling Aspen (*Populus tremuloides*). Paper birch is also known as white birch and canoe birch.

Paper birch is a useful tree. The bark, buds, catkins, leaves, sap and wood are all used. The bark is a traditional material used by many Indigenous peoples for making baskets, cradles, and canoes in addition to using it as a wrapping for storing food and a roofing material. The wood is considered a hardwood and is used for bowls, wooden utensils, tongue depressors, veneer logs, paneling, cutting boards, flooring and firewood. The leaves, buds, and catkins have medicinal properties for using in a tea, functioning as an anti-inflammatory, and /or clearing sinus congestion. The sap is used as a beverage in the spring (e.g. birch water), used in making beer and /or vodka, and /or or processed into syrup.



The Sugaring Off process for birch is different from Maple syrup. While the equipment used for both processes is the same, this is where the similarities end. Everything about birch sap and syrup is different. Different tree, different sap composition, different end use. The table below displays some of the differences between birch and maple syrup.



Birch Sap is a Non-Timber Forest Product /NTPF and the management of a birch stand for sap is a form of Agroforestry. At Moose Meadows Farm, we incorporate silvopasture practices that intentionally combine the management of trees, forages, and livestock through providing forage opportunities for our camelids (alpacas / llamas). This process maintains our pasture through a natural form of vegetation management and does not damage the birch trees.



In 2014, birch sap and syrup was added to the Schedule **“Qualifying Agricultural Uses”** of the **“Classification of Land as a Farm Regulation”**. This means that management of birch trees for the production of sap and /or syrup became recognised as an activity for the purposes of classifying land as a farm and birch sap and syrup as a “primary agriculture product”.

### Differences between Birch Syrup and (Sugar) Maple Syrup

	Paper Birch	Sugar Maple
Primary Sugar in Syrup	Fructose	Sucrose
Ratio Sap to Syrup (litres)	1:80-100	1: 40
Distribution	Across Canada - except areas along British Columbia / Yukon Coast and the Arctic	Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, PEI, southern Ontario and Quebec
Brix (Sugar Density) for Shelf Stability	60 degrees Brix	66 degrees Brix
pH (Acidity)	4.6	6.0
Culinary Uses	Marinades, Vinegariettes, Flavouring (like Vanilla)	Waffles, Pancakes, Cookies, Cakes,
Flavour	<b>darker, stronger and richer</b>	Simple and Sweet
Season	2-4 weeks early spring (April / may)	Late January - early April
Viscosity	½ of Maple	<b>150 - 200 CPS</b>
Average Tree Life	80-100 years	<b>400 years</b>

Centipoise (CPS) is the viscosity value that is assigned to liquids.

### About the Author

Heloise Dixon-Warren owns and operates Moose Meadows Farm with her husband Ted Traer. Established in April, 2002, Moose Meadows Farm is a diverse operation with the tagline *“Where we farm with the Seasons”*. Heloise and Ted have been tapping birch trees and making birch syrup since 2006. They have a 2’ x 6’ evaporator and Sugar Shack on their property for making the syrup. Every April, Ted, the syrup maker, taps 200-300 trees, on average, and spends 2-3 weeks “logging on”. They often host a Sugaring Off Farm Festival during this time. In 2007, Heloise authored and co-published the *“Birch Syrup Production Manual - Tapping into Syrup Boreal Forest Style”*. In 2008, Moose Meadows Farm was awarded the 2008 AWARD OF EXCELLENCE FOR INNOVATION IN AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD for the development and promotion of the birch syrup industry in British Columbia.



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