

MAD ABOUT MAPLE

Memories of a Sugar Shack

During my 13 years of teaching, I have chaperoned field trips from Radio City to the Rodin Museum. Perhaps the most memorable was an eighth grade French class trip to Québec. I accompanied my friend and former colleague Kathleen and her *douzaine* French students on a four-day stay in Québec City. Our days and evenings were filled with engaging excursions, from a ferry ride along the St. Lawrence to a behind-the-scenes tour of the Château Frontenac.

Although it was mid-March, warm and waterproof footwear was a must for traversing the Plains of Abraham. Despite the foot of snow, it was springtime, the start of “sugaring off season,” when Québec celebrates the collection of sap from maple trees.

Given our timing, dinner and musical festivities at a sugar shack were highlights of our itinerary. As our bus arrived at the large cabin topped with snow, we were greeted by the sweetest of “amuse bouches” — maple taffy. “Tire Sur la Neige,” or “tire d’érable,” is a sugary treat made by pouring boiling maple sap over trays of fresh snow and then rolling the sap around a popsicle stick. Needless to say, our students enjoyed dessert both before and after dinner that evening. Between sugar and song, the return drive back to the hotel was the most boisterous bus ride I have ever experienced.

Memories of Québec and maple syrup return each March, whether the ground is covered in snow or crocus blooms. So, to celebrate this sugar season, I share a savory maple syrup recipe featuring lamb, another herald of spring.

The lamb sirloins I recommend are from one of my favorite meat purveyors, D’Artagnan. This grass-fed Australian lamb is mild in flavor and tender in texture. A package consists of four sirloins, each an ideal size for an individual portion. While I encourage you to use your favorite whiskey, I like WhistlePig Rye, aged ten years at the brand’s Vermont farmhouse distillery. The cooking concentrates the whiskey’s caramel and butterscotch flavors, enhancing those same tasting notes in the syrup. 🍷



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MAPLE WHISKEY LAMB SIRLOIN

Ingredients

- 4 lamb sirloins
- 1/3 cup maple syrup
- ¼ cup whiskey
- 5 sprigs fresh thyme
- 1 sprig fresh rosemary
- Sea salt
- Fresh ground pepper
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 tablespoon butter

Instructions

Score the lamb with a fork to better absorb the marinade and place the lamb in a plastic bag or Pyrex dish. Combine the maple syrup and whiskey in a measuring cup and pour into the bag or dish, coating the lamb. Add the fresh herbs.

Marinate in the refrigerator for at least three hours or overnight. An hour before cooking, remove the lamb from the refrigerator. Place on a dish and season both sides with salt and pepper to taste. Reserve the marinade.

When ready to cook, heat the oil and butter in a nonstick pan. Sauté the lamb as you would a filet of beef, making sure to sear on each side before turning. For medium rare, cook to 130 degrees, then let rest for five to ten minutes. The lamb should reach a temperature of 145 degrees in the meantime. While the lamb is resting, add about a quarter of the marinade to the pan and reduce until syrupy.

Slice the lamb against the grain, and drizzle with the whiskey-syrup. Serve with a creamy polenta and an arugula salad. The peppery greens will be a bright complement to the sweetness of the lamb.

Happy sugar season 2021!