

The magic of maple

By MARY-LIZ SHAW
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Some years ago, my husband's aunt took up an unusual food challenge after a friend mentioned his love of garlic. He loved it so much, he said, that he could eat garlic for breakfast, lunch and dinner and all the way through each meal, up to and including dessert. So Aunt Judy came up with a dinner that used garlic "all the way through."

I don't remember what she served for the appetizer and entrée, but I distinctly recall that the meal ended with garlic ice cream. Aunt Judy insists that it did not gross out anyone who tried it.

OK, so garlic ice cream isn't about to capture the nation's taste buds any time soon. Yet the challenge of taking a single ingredient "all the way through" a day's menu is intriguing. And it got me thinking about what ingredients could and would travel that far.

Cheese, apple, orange, lemon, chocolate, yogurt, honey, cinnamon, nutmeg. There are more possibilities than we realize, including ingredients that we tend to associate with just one meal.

How about pure maple syrup? With the sap running now in Wisconsin's maple trees, it is a good time to reconsider the range of this delicious plant food.

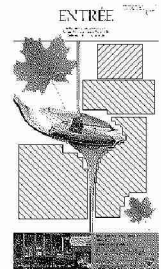
Sweet and earthy, with a pleasing color palette that runs from pale gold to deep chestnut, maple syrup can hold up through a variety of dishes.

Pia Mara Finkell, a trained pastry chef who now works for the Quebec federation of Maple Syrup Producers, says many consumers don't think about maple syrup as a versatile, through-the-meal food. In fact,

maple syrup has been that and more in its long history, which goes back to American Indian tribes, who taught European settlers how to tap sugar maples with spiles in the early spring, then to boil down the sticky sap to make syrup.

"It was a homeopathic remedy for centuries," Finkell says. "We're creating recipes all the time, using pure maple syrup in all kinds of dishes. We're using it in soups, in glazes for meats and seafood. . . . Right now, we're working to

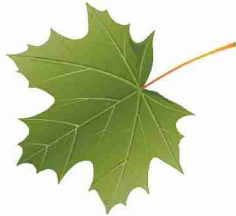
In the midst
of sap season,
think of syrup
to add pizzazz
throughout
the meal



put out maple syrup cocktails.”

That last use of maple syrup is in response to the natural-foods trend that has swept through the beverages industry — as it has already done in other aspects of the culinary world.

Mixologists who desire pure ingredients opt for maple syrup instead of simple syrup, made of cane or beet sugar and water. Cocktails that use maple syrup, such as the Noreaster (see recipes), have a depth of sweetness and flavor, Finkell says.



One of Finkell's favorite new uses for maple syrup is the Maple Latte. The idea came from Grounded, a New York cafe, where a Canadian barista created the drink in honor of his homeland.

(Grounded calls theirs “The Canadian Latte.”) It is simply a matter of adding a shot or two of maple syrup to the espresso and milk drink “and it tastes absolutely delicious,” Finkell says. “Really, you wouldn't believe how good it is.”

If you have doubts about consuming all that syrup, consider this: A recent study by a University of Rhode Island researcher found that a ¼-cup serving of pure maple syrup contains 20 antioxidants, including several cancer-fighting compounds. Finkell adds that pure maple syrup takes longer to digest. These properties make it a healthier choice than sugar, she says, which holds about the same amount of calories but with no beneficial compounds.

Different grades of syrup have different uses. The lightest version (Grade A light amber) is usually reserved as a table syrup because of its delicate flavor. Grade A Medium Amber and Grade A Dark Amber can be used for savory dishes and all cooking and baking applications, imparting a hearty maple flavor.

If you wish to try maple syrup all the way through a day, we have recipes inside that feature pure maple syrup for breakfast (Maple Cream Scones), lunch (Mango Black Bean Salad), dinner (Scallops with Lemon and Maple Dressing and Ham Steak with Maple Raisin Sauce) and dessert (Black Bottom Cheesecake Bars).

And absolutely, positively no garlic ice cream.

► Maple syrup recipes. 4N

MAPLE SYRUP RECIPES

Maple syrup pairs beautifully with lemon, says Pia Mara Finkell, a pastry chef and a spokeswoman for the Federation of Quebec Maple Syrup Producers. Both maple and lemon enhance the delicate flavors in seafood. This unusual scallop recipe is the dish of the month (March) at *purecanadamaple.com*, the Quebec federation's official site. Serve for dinner or a robust lunch.

Scallops with Lemon and Maple Dressing

Makes 4 servings

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| <p>1 tablespoon butter
 1 shallot, minced
 2 tablespoons lemon juice
 ¼ cup dry white wine
 1 teaspoon minced lemon zest
 ¼ cup maple syrup</p> | <p>½ cup half-and-half cream
 ½ tablespoon pink peppercorns, crushed
 Sea salt to taste
 2 tablespoons vegetable oil
 1 ½ pounds large scallops</p> |
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In a saucepan, melt butter and sauté shallot. Deglaze with lemon juice and white wine and let simmer until reduced by half. Add lemon zest and maple syrup and bring to a boil.

Add half-and-half and simmer 2 to 3 minutes, stirring throughout. Add peppercorns and season with salt. Set aside and keep warm.

In a skillet, heat oil over high heat. Gently cook scallops



FEDERATION OF QUEBEC MAPLE SYRUP PRODUCERS

Maple and lemon enhance the flavors in this scallop recipe.

either 1 minute on each side or on one side only until the top turns slightly opaque. Serve immediately with the sauce and a side of seasonal vegetables.

Try this for a refreshing lunch. This recipe is adapted from *purecanadamaple.com*.

Mango Black Bean Salad with Sesame Vinaigrette

Makes 4 Servings

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| <p>¼ cup plus 2 tablespoons lime juice
 ¼ cup plus 2 tablespoons rice wine vinegar
 1 teaspoon light sesame oil
 1 tablespoon olive oil
 1 teaspoon fish sauce
 2 teaspoons minced fresh ginger
 1 to 2 tablespoons pure Canadian maple syrup
 1 mango, peeled, seeded and cut into ½-inch chunks</p> | <p>3 cups cooked black beans or 2 cans (15 ounces each) black beans, rinsed and drained
 1 medium cucumber, peeled, seeded and sliced into ¼-inch slices
 3 thinly sliced green onions, white and green parts
 ½ cup roughly chopped cilantro
 Cilantro sprigs and lime wedges, for garnish</p> |
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Prepare dressing in a nonreactive container or bowl by whisking together lime juice, rice wine vinegar, sesame oil, olive oil, fish sauce and ginger. Taste and adjust seasonings with maple syrup as necessary, according to individual taste.



FEDERATION OF QUEBEC MAPLE SYRUP PRODUCERS

This mango black bean salad provides a refreshing lunch.

Prepare salad in a large nonreactive bowl: Place mango, black beans, cucumber, green onions and cilantro in bowl. Pour dressing over salad and toss to coat well. Serve with cilantro sprigs and extra lime wedges.



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FEDERATION OF QUEBEC MAPLE SYRUP PRODUCERS

Maple cream scones are the perfect breakfast with a maple latte.

This recipe is adapted from "Maple Syrup Cookbook" (2001, Storey) by Jim Haedrich. Serve for breakfast with a maple latte.

Maple Cream Scones

Makes about 12

2 cups flour (plus more for work surface)	¾ cup heavy whipping cream
1 tablespoon baking powder	2 tablespoons melted butter
¾ teaspoon salt	¼ cup plus 2 tablespoons maple syrup (divided)
¼ cup (½ stick) cold butter, cut into ¼-inch pieces	

Preheat oven to 425 degrees. Lightly grease a baking sheet or line with parchment. In a large bowl, combine flour, baking powder and salt. Cut in the ¼ cup butter with two knives or pastry blender until mixture resembles coarse crumbs. Make a well in mixture.

Blend cream with ¼ cup maple syrup and pour into well. Stir quickly and lightly until dough is just combined.

Lightly flour a work surface. Turn out dough and knead gently 4 or 5 times. Pat or roll out to ¾-inch thickness.

Cut into rounds with a biscuit cutter and place on prepared baking sheet.

Blend the 2 tablespoons melted butter with remaining 2 tablespoons maple syrup. Brush a little mixture on each scone, keeping remaining mixture warm. Bake scones in preheated oven 15 minutes, or until golden. Serve scones hot, drizzling a bit of the maple-butter mixture over each.

This sweet-and-savory recipe is adapted from the "Maple Syrup Cookbook."

This recipe is adapted from Haedrich's "Maple Syrup Cookbook" (Storey, 2001). This is an unusual pairing of chocolate with maple syrup.

The Noreaster cocktail is made with maple syrup instead of simple syrup.

This cocktail recipe is adapted from one created at Char No. 4 in New York.

Noreaster

Makes 1 cocktail

1 ½ ounces bourbon	1 ounce ginger beer or ginger ale
½ ounce fresh lime juice	Lime wheel for garnish
½ ounce pure maple syrup	

Combine bourbon, lime juice and maple syrup in a mixing glass.

Add ice and shake vigorously.

Strain into a rocks glass filled with ice and top with ginger beer. Garnish with a lime wheel.

Ham Steaks in Maple-Raisin Sauce

Makes 4 servings

2 ham steaks (1 pound each)
2 cups apple cider
¾ cup pure maple syrup (divided)
½ cup dark rum
¼ to ⅓ cup fresh orange juice
1 cup raisins

Preheat oven to 350 degrees.

Put ham steaks in a shallow, heatproof casserole.

In medium saucepan, bring cider, ½ cup maple syrup, rum, orange juice and raisins to a near boil. Remove from heat. Cover and let sit 10 minutes. Remove raisins using a slotted spoon to a small bowl and add enough of the cooking liquid to cover them. Pour remaining cooking liquid over ham and bake in preheated oven 1 hour.

Remove ham from oven. Heat broiler.

Combine raisins and soaking liquid in a food processor, along with several spoonfuls of casserole liquid and remaining ¼ cup maple syrup.

Process briefly, allowing large chunks to remain.

Pour processed mixture over ham and place casserole under preheated broiler 2 to 4 minutes until ham topping sizzles and browns, being careful to check often to prevent mixture from burning. Serve hot.

Black-Bottom Cheesecake Bars

Makes about 24

Rich Maple Short Crust (see recipe)
1 pound cream cheese, room temperature
½ cup sour cream, room temperature
2 eggs
¾ cup maple syrup
1 teaspoon vanilla extract
1 teaspoon fresh lemon juice
1 ½ to 2 cups chocolate chips

Prepare maple short crust.

Preheat oven to 400 degrees.

With an electric mixer, beat cream cheese in bowl until light and fluffy. Beat in sour cream, then eggs, one at a time. Gradually beat in maple syrup, then vanilla and lemon juice.

Sprinkle chocolate chips evenly over prepared crust. Slowly pour on cheese mixture.

Bake in preheated oven 15 minutes, then reduce oven temperature to 350 degrees and bake 30 minutes longer, until cake is puffy and develops cracks on top.

Cool on wire rack, then cover and chill. When well chilled, cut into bars.

Rich maple short crust:

Makes 1 13-by-9-inch crust

¾ cup (1 ½ sticks) butter, room temperature
⅓ cup maple syrup
½ teaspoon vanilla extract
2 cups flour
½ teaspoon salt

In bowl, cream butter with electric mixer until light. Gradually add maple syrup and vanilla.

Combine flour and salt, then gradually add to creamed mixture, working in with a wooden spoon.

Using floured hands, pat into 13-by-9-inch baking dish. Smooth out with a can or bottle. Refrigerate until needed.