



*Tapping a maple tree*

family festival, particularly in Quebec. The sap runs when the moon is in the proper phase and the daytime temperature is at least 5°C. It runs at its most sweet when the warm days come late, and it runs most easily when the day is foggy and the nighttime temperature is below freezing.

Twenty-five years ago the farmers made their rounds in the spring with a horse-drawn sled, but now the big producers use tractor-drawn wagons and the smaller ones use snowmobiles. The traditional system of collecting - by tapping the individual trees with spigots and letting the sap flow into a covered bucket - still prevails among the farmers who may own 2000 to 3000 producing trees, but the big commercial operations now link the trees with plastic tubing and the sap is pumped into stor-

age tanks. The tubing is said to increase production by as much as forty per cent.

The old method is more fun, and attracts many relatives and friends from the cities willing to lend a hand and taste the results. The farmer and his helpers first tap the trees and set out the buckets - a full day's hard work for three on an average farm. Collection begins the following day when the sun is well up and the frost has melted away. The sound of the sap dripping is loud in the woods. Workers tip the sap in their gathering pail, then filter it and send it on to storage tanks where it rests overnight. It takes the sap of at least 200 fast flowing trees to fill a twenty liter tank.

The following day, the sap is boiled for hours in a series of open pans at carefully controlled temperatures. At 104° one gets syrup; at 110° one gets toffee and at 115° maple sugar. It takes 30 to 35 liters of sap to produce one liter of syrup.

The feast which follows includes a base of pea soup, followed by many maple specialties such as crêpes and syrup, maple sugar spread on crusty bread and covered with thick country cream, or hot toffee dropped in snow to make it harden.

Spring has truly arrived.