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Maple trees have been drilled for sap at St. John's since 1942.

Sap collecting season begins

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The maple syrup season tapped off to a start last week.

On Saturday, staff and volunteers of the St. John's Arboretum and Abbey drilled holes into the maple trees in the woods by St. John's to collect sap.

Steve Saupe, biology professor and co-organizer of the production, said the tapping season runs from about mid-March to mid-April.

"Maple trees (sap) run when daytime temperatures are above freezing and nighttime temperatures are below," Saupe said.

Festival

The Arboretum has been preparing to host its maple syrup festival March 24 and 31 by starting the tapping process now.

Steve Devereaux, environmental education fellow at the St. John's Arboretum, said the maple syrup tradition started at St. John's in 1942 during the sugar ration associated with World War II. The festivals were started a few years ago as a way to invite the public to participate in the process.

"It's a way to commemorate the tradition," Devereaux said. "It's a chance for everyone to see what's going on."

Tours showing how to tap the trees and ice cream with maple syrup are

some of the activities planned. The evaporator will also run for visitors each day.

Tapping process

The operation began with an assembly of sap collecting bags March 8. Volunteers attached blue plastic bags to metal holders that keep the bags open to catch sap.

Devereaux said the maple trees can be tapped once the tree is 10 inches around. For every five inches over 10, another tap can be added. Last year's hole is avoided.

"We drill five inches over and five inches either up or down from the scar tissue of last year," Devereaux said.

The drilled hole is 1.5 inches deep and spiles are tapped in. A spile is a metal spout which is placed into the tree for the sap to pour out.

The bags are attached and collection begins. Saupe said about 600 taps are usually drilled per year.

Senior Margaret Glady and sophomore John Smith participated in the tapping session Saturday morning. They were both responsible for tapping spiles into the trees.

"I could locate where to tap the spile by either the hole or the stream

See SYRUP Page 5

How the sap becomes syrup

SYRUP

from Page 3

of sap," Gladly said. "By the time we were leaving after an hour and a half, the trees we began with collected about two cups of sap."

"It's neat to just learn about the whole process," Smith said. "It's simple but (it's) a process."

Smith went out again Sunday with his family to gather sap already collected in the bags.

Gladly said she enjoyed the new experience.

"It was cool to see all the blue bags and all the work we had done."

Sap to syrup

The sap is collected from the bags at vari-

ous points during the season. The collected sap is brought to the sugar shack where it is made into syrup. The sugar shack is located by St. John's Preparatory School's athletic fields.

Devereaux said sap contains two percent sugar and when the syrup is completed it contains 66.7 percent sugar. To get the sap to this consistency, it is boiled in the evaporator. Saupe said the syrup is completed in the evaporator when it boils at seven degrees above the boiling point of water.

The syrup is then filtered and the final boiling is completed on a small stove.

"We finish the syrup on a small gas stove. That way we can control the temperature," Saupe said.

The finished syrup is then poured into bottles to be purchased at the festival and for the monastic community to use in the dining room or as gifts.



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A volunteer attaches the plastic bag to the spile to collect the sap to make maple syrup.