

LAKE PLACID NEWS

ROTARY CLUB NEWS: Trees give us more than just maple syrup



Mike Farrell boils maple sap into syrup at Cornell University's Uihlein Forest in March 2016. (News photo — Andy Flynn)

In a recent presentation to the Rotary Club of Lake Placid, Mike Farrell, co-founder and CEO of The Forest Farmers, producers of New Leaf Tree Syrups, educated members about various local trees that can be tapped for their sap and syrup.

Based in Lyon Mountain, The Forest Farmers own 7,000 acres in the foothills of the Adirondack Mountains and 2,500 acres in the Green Mountains of Vermont.

They are a leading supplier of certified organic tree saps and syrups used by food technologists and manufacturers in beverages and packaged goods.

“One of our company’s overarching goals is to protect and improve the vital natural resources for current and future generations,” said Farrell, of Lake Placid. “Proper forest stewardship is essential to our mission and we believe that sustainable harvesting of tree saps and other wild foods is one of the best ways to ensure long-term viability of our forest resources.”

Former director of Cornell University’s Uihlein Forest, a maple syrup research and extension field station on Bear Cub Lane in Lake Placid, Farrell addressed several questions from interested attendees.

Q: How did you get interested in maple syrup?

A: I first learned about the wonders of maple syrup during a college field trip while obtaining a master’s degree in forestry from the SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry in Syracuse. I then started tapping trees on our family’s property and soon after went on to serve for 13 years as the director of Cornell University’s Uihlein Forest, a maple syrup research and extension field station in Lake Placid. During my time there I conducted a great deal of research and education on the potential for tapping other species beyond maple. My PhD explored the future growth of the maple industry and in 2013, my book “The Sugarmaker’s Companion: An Integrated Guide to Producing Syrup from Maple, Birch, and Walnut Trees,” was published by Chelsea Green Publishing.

Q: What species of trees produce edible sap and syrup?

A: Maple trees aren't the only tree that produces a delicious sap every spring. Birch, walnut, beech, sycamore and basswood are some of the other species that can also be tapped for their sap and syrup. Whereas birch and walnut sap flows freely, extracting the delicious sap from beech, sycamore and basswood requires more sophisticated technology and practices that make this syrup extremely rare, and naturally, more expensive.

Q: What is maple water and birch water?

A: The liquid that flows through maple, birch, and other tree species every spring is most commonly referred to as sap, though when bottled up and sold as a beverage it will often be described as "maple water" or "birch water." It is primarily water that is naturally fortified with a wide range of minerals, polyphenols, and antioxidants. It also contains a small amount of sugar that gives it a subtly sweet flavor. New Leaf Tree Syrups is a leading supplier of maple and birch sap to many beverage companies in the U.S. including one of the more popular brands, "Drink Simple."

Q: Can you eat walnut syrup if allergic to walnuts or other tree nuts?

A: Walnut syrup has been found to contain no detectable walnut allergen. In a pilot study conducted at Cincinnati Children's Hospital found that patients who tested positive for walnut allergy by skin test had no reaction to skin testing with walnut syrup, nor to an oral challenge with walnut syrup.

The Rotary Club of Lake Placid is one of over 30,000 clubs worldwide. Members from over 200 countries are part of a global network of 1.2 million people who come together to make positive, lasting change in communities locally, nationally and internationally.

The club meets every Thursday at 7:20 a.m. at the Marriott Courtyard hotel. To learn more about the good deeds of Rotary, go to www.rotary.org or visit the Facebook page.
