



MAPLE LEAVES
FOREVER

Summer 2026 News

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MLF Celebrates Indigenous History and Honours Founder Ken Jewett

A message from MLF Executive
Director,
Deb Pella Keen



June is **National Indigenous History Month** in Canada, a time to recognize and celebrate the rich cultures, traditions, and contributions of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples.

Among the many gifts Indigenous Peoples have shared with the world is the art and science of maple syrup making. Long before European settlement, Indigenous communities developed the knowledge and techniques for harvesting maple sap and transforming it into syrup and sugar, establishing a tradition that remains an enduring symbol of Canada today. As we celebrate our nation's maple heritage, we also acknowledge the Indigenous stewardship of the land and forests that made this tradition possible.

Friend and colleague, Peter Kuitenbrouwer, RPF has provided us a history of syrup making for our newsletter, below.

Memorial Maple Grove Update

On May 12-13, the memorial grove for Ken Jewett really started to take shape when Somerville Nurseries planted 15 native maples at Thompson Trail Park in Mulmur. An official dedication event is being planned for this summer. Stay tuned for more updates!



Young maples newly planted at Thompson Trail Park, Mulmur.





Deb with the team from Somerville Nurseries

Deb Pella Keen

On behalf of the Maple Leaves Forever Team

MLF News

MAPLE TREE REBATE APPLICATIONS

for FALL PLANTING will open

August 14th through November 4th.

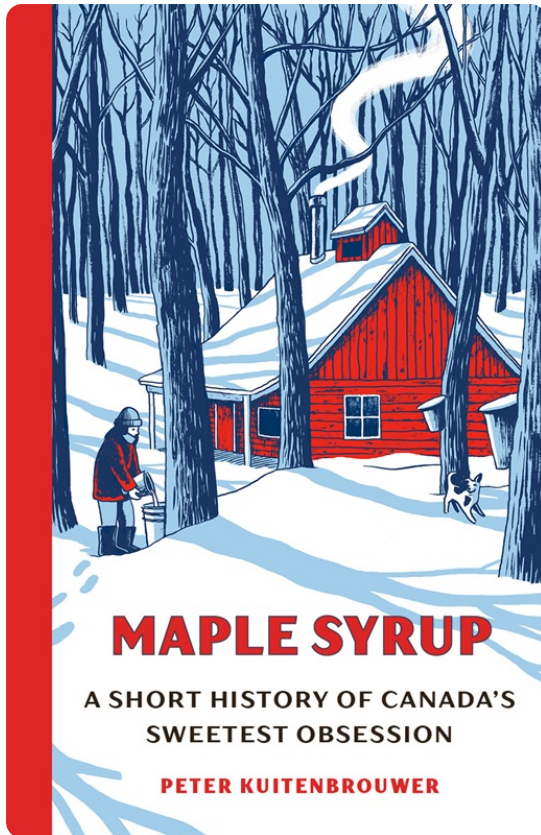
Trees must be planted by November 15th.

[**LEARN MORE**](#)

Indigenous Origins of Sugaring

By Peter Kuitenbrouwer

First Nations taught settlers how to get sweetener from a sugar maple tree



The skill of how to tap sugar maple trees in Spring and boil the sap down into a sweetener is one of many crafts that the First Peoples taught to settlers in North America. Sugaring's Indigenous origins takes up a chapter in my new book, *Maple Syrup: A short history of Canada's sweetest obsession*.

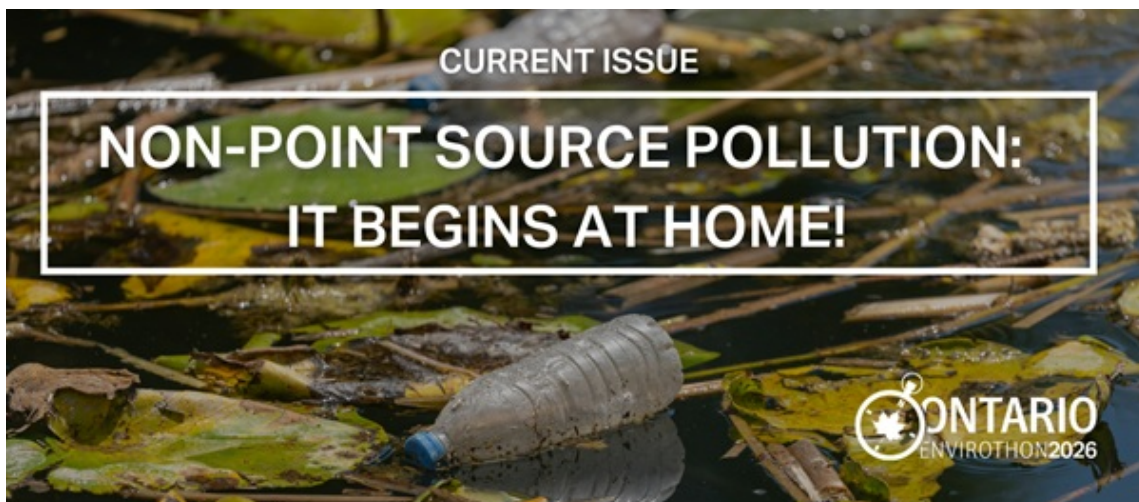
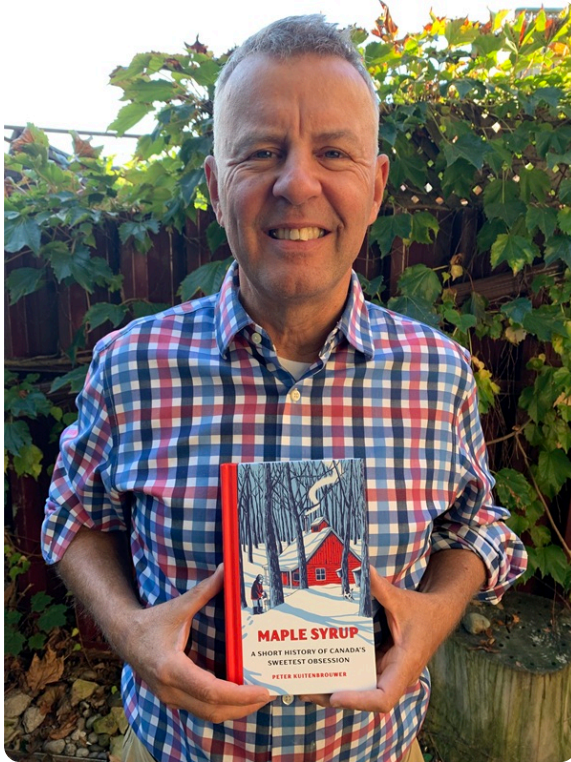
Long before settlement, the Anishnaabe, Haudenosaunee, Huron and other Nations depended on maple sugar as a staple in their diet. In spring it was the women who made the sugar. They used maple sugar to season their food and to remedy breathing problems, heart and stomach problems.

The First Peoples of the 17th to 19th centuries sold maple sugar in blocks packaged in birch bark, known as *makaks*, that could weigh up to about 12 kilograms each, supplying fur trading companies who redistributed the sugar to their trading posts.

However, once the First Peoples had taught them the art of syrup-making, colonists cut the forests for agriculture or took the forests for settler use, while pushing the Indigenous peoples onto reserves. This part of the maple syrup story clouds, discolours and embitters our national condiment. There is also good news: Many First Nations have in recent years returned to the sugar bush. These operations include Ziibaakdakaan Maple northwest of Toronto and Giizhigat Maple Products on St. Joseph's Island near Sault Ste. Marie.

Indigenous producers featured in the book include Wasauksing Maple Products, on Parry Island in the Georgian Bay. The island, about 250 kilometres north of Toronto, is bigger than Manhattan but sparsely populated, home to about 400 Anishnaabe people. One thing abounds on this island: sugar maple trees. Thanks to this bounty, Wasauksing has a growing reputation for its thick, golden delicious maple syrup.

[Peter Kuitenbrouwer](#) is a writer and a Registered Professional Forester who makes maple syrup with family and friends at their farm in Madoc, Ont. His book, *Maple Syrup: a short history of Canada's sweetest obsession* (Doubleday Canada 2025) is available where books are sold, or [here](#).





From Deb Pella Keen: On May 27, I was honoured to be part of the Ontario Envirothon championship as a judge on the final day. Almost 500 students from 70 schools participated in competitions in the lead up to the provincial championship held at the University of Waterloo.

Congratulations to the top ranking teams:

- First Place: University of Toronto Schools
- Second Place: Waterloo Collegiate Institute
- Third Place: Milliken Mills High School



2026 1st Place team from University of Toronto Schools.



Competition Judges Left to right: Johanna Wandel, UofW; Derik Armitage, UofW; Victoria Houle, OPG; Jess Kaknevicus, Forest Canada and Deb, MLF

Every year, the provincial competition celebrates the team that shows exceptional positivity toward their peers and competitors alike with a "Spirit Award". This year, we are absolutely delighted to share that the award has been renamed the **Maple Leaves Forever Spirit Award**.

This honor recognizes Ken Jewett, founder of MLF, and celebrates his deep commitment to empowering youth as environmental leaders through curiosity and community building.

Due to the overwhelming spirit demonstrated at the 2026 championship, three teams tied for the Maple Leaves Forever Spirit Award:

- Innisdale Secondary School from Simcoe/Dufferin region
- Port Hope High School from Kawartha Lakes region
- West Elgin Secondary School from the Southwestern region

Congratulations to the teams, and especially stoked that a potted native Red Maple tree accompanied one of the teams for their journey!



Deb with the Maple Leaves Forever Spirit Award Winners

Find out more about Ontario Envirothon at:

forestscanada.ca/en/program/ontario-envirothon

Maple Care and Planting

~ SUMMER TREE CARE ~



Consider using a tree-watering bag, a bucket with holes, or a slow running hose to give young trees a slow and thorough watering in the dry summer months.

June - August

- [water newly planted](#) & established maples as needed, frequency will increase during hot, dry conditions
- consider using [tree watering bags](#) to reduce risk of water stress
- fertilize established trees as recommended, but not newly planted trees

- monitor for presence of insects or other pests
- check for seed development on mature sugar maple trees if interested in [harvesting](#) or know of others interested in collecting sugar maple seed (seed matures in mid/late September)
- [add or restore mulch](#) as needed & clear surrounding weeds
- the recommended time for [pruning](#) young maples is mid-July through early August
- seek assistance if trees appear to be stressed

Late August

- if you are considering planting trees in the fall, visit our [Rebate page](#). You may be eligible for a Thank You Rebate for planting native maples on your rural property

Early September

- [water](#) trees slowly and deeply to help trees store nutrients & prepare for winter
- inspect tree form, [prune](#) only lightly, as needed

[View our online MAPLE CARE CALENDAR](#)

for more details, year-round maple care & planting advice

Nursery News

Put your Nursery in the MLF Spotlight!

Are you one of our Nursery Partners? We want to feature your Nursery in our E-News! We include featured articles about one or more of our Partner Nurseries in our quarterly newsletters, on our blog and shared on our social channels.

If your nursery would like to participate with an interview, article or just share some news, please drop a line to Deb at

deb.pellakeen@mapleleavesforever.ca.

Our E-newsletter has a growing readership of nearly 2400 recipients, all of whom have expressly chosen to receive our notes to their email, and most of whom live in the Southern Ontario region. Take advantage of this free opportunity to grow awareness about your enterprise!

How can you help?



TELL A FRIEND!

If you recently received our Thank You Rebate, or you find our tree care information helpful - please share this email with your contacts and encourage them to plant native Canadian maples too!

SHARE YOUR MAPLE PHOTOS

We love seeing photos and stories about your maple plantings - please email them to info@mapleleavesforever.ca.

Why did I get this email?

We've put together this email news list to inform, update and remind our subsidy applicants, nursery partners, and anyone else who might be interested in our activities and encourage the planting and ongoing care of more native maples in rural Ontario!

We only send 4 emails a year, in Winter, Spring, Summer and Fall. You can [unsubscribe](#) from these mailings at any time. No hard feelings.



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