

Sometimes, one thing leads to another. In this case, though, it might be more accurate to say that two things led to a third. Or, really, it has been a progression of events. The end result, if it is the end, will, I think, be very useful.

Several years ago, we began to wonder what kind of maple syrup the silver maples in our yard would make. Traditionally, the sugar maple trees, also called “hard maples,” are the ones that sugar makers prefer. And, in our family sugaring operation in the woods, those are the ones that are ordinarily tapped. But, we still wondered.

So, we tapped the trees in our yard and made a couple of quarts of syrup, and it did not seem to be any different from that we made in the woods. We boiled the sap on a single burner propane “turkey cooker” and finished it on the stove in the kitchen.

The next year, we included the hard maple trees in the yard at the other house. We made a little more “backyard syrup.” This went on for a couple of seasons, and last spring, we also tapped half a dozen hard maple trees that grow along the fencerow between fields.

By this time, we had too much sap to cook in a large kettle on the propane cooker. At the same time, the family operation changed from “flat pan” syrup to the use of an evaporator. In the process, the “finishing pan” was no longer needed. But, it was just the right size for the main cooking of our little home syrup enterprise.

That led to building an “arch” here in our yard. This is basically a fireplace that is the right size for the finishing pan to cover the opening, with a fire box below. That worked fine, but on a couple of occasions, when we had wind and snow or rain, we had to rig up a tarp to try to keep moisture from getting into our sap pan, and also to keep the wind from slowing down the boiling process.

Last spring, the top blew out of a large white pine west of the Maple Tree Field. Runo cut the rest of the tree down and cut it into logs. This fall, Tim came and made nice white pine lumber out of the tree that had—to our advantage—lost its top earlier. If it had not, Runo would not have cut it down.

During the last few weeks, when there was no other task that was imperative, Runo worked on building a little sap house around the arch in the yard. He fit work on the small building with a shed roof in between other things that needed more immediate attention. On the first of this month, he finished the roof and put a simple latch on the door. It will be fun to cook sap in comfort this next spring.

In the meantime, our balsam fir Christmas tree, that we won’t bring into the house yet, is resting in the sap house, safe from the destructive tendencies of two border collie pups. The quilt square that had its place on the yard fence is now on the east wall of the sap house.

People who are great planners probably don’t have these progressions that change their ways of doing what they do. But, our lives do not have such a rigid structure, and as long as we keep our

livestock in good shape, do our chores diligently, have food in the cellar and wood in the shed, we can enjoy living in the moment. And, when an opportunity arises, we can, if we wish, take advantage of it. When we wondered how syrup from a silver maple tasted, we had no idea we would have a nice little sap house here in the yard a few years later.

