

Having a “sweet tooth” is an affliction of many of us. We eat candy, cookies, cakes, sugared drinks, and, oddly, use sugar in many non-sweet foods. And, it seems that there are two issues involved in this for most of us. First, of course, we just eat too much sweet stuff. There is no logical argument to refute that. It shows up in our weight, our dental health, our preponderance of diseases like diabetes, and in our mood swings.

There’s another issue, too. Most of that sugar is a white, refined, granular substance that comes from either sugar beets—chemically grown, much of it in our own state, or from sugar cane grown in states far from us who consume it. If we want to avoid both of these products but still indulge in our addiction to sweets, there is a way to accomplish this.

Look around our area—we have maple woods as a major natural landscape feature. And, those trees can produce the sweetness we crave.

Maple syrup is a major product in our state. And, most of us are familiar with its flavor and its uses, on pancakes and waffles, especially.

But, maple sugar that can be used just as white beet or cane sugar is less available and much more expensive.

If one has a few maple trees to tap in late winter/early spring, though, granulated maple sugar is a distinct possibility. During the last couple of years, I have discovered that I can almost always substitute it for white sugar. I haven’t tried to bake an angel food cake using maple sugar, but I will, one of these days. I do know that cookies, most other cakes, pies, and crisps work just as well with maple sugar and make me feel a little better about eating them. For some reason, too, baked goods made with granulated maple sugar taste just sweet enough, not so excessively sugary as we sometimes notice with “regular” sugar.

Making granulated maple sugar isn’t hard. It is somewhat time consuming, but if one is very careful, part of the process can take place while one is busy with something else.

The greatest difficulty comes when the heat under the kettle is too intense, especially toward the end of the cooking period. Anyone who has made or used maple syrup knows that, given a little too much heat, it can climb the sides of a saucepan in a hurry. If it boils over, the best scenario is a big mess. If the heat isn’t turned off immediately—something one cannot do with a wood stove—fire and smoke can be the result. Table salt and baking soda are the remedies.

But, if one is careful and watchful, maple syrup can be cooked until it becomes very thick. Instructions vary as to temperature. I have successfully made granulated sugar in the 245 F. range, but higher works more quickly and more reliably. After cooking, it is necessary to beat the syrup until it granulates. Then, I usually sift it, though it isn’t necessary for most uses.

I have experimented with granulated maple sugar in many recipes. It has been successful in everything I’ve tried. And knowing that there is labor involved in making it, I am more careful about our consumption of sugar. That can’t be a bad thing, either.

Swedish pepparkakor are equally good made with maple sugar. So are

the sour cream chocolate or spice cupcakes we sometimes bake. A jelly roll made with maple sugar seems superior to one using the usual sweetener. And, just a spoonful of granulated maple sugar on buttered toast sweetens the breakfast menu.

So, I am looking forward to another sap season. And, I am thankful that there are still many Mason jars of syrup from last spring standing in the fruit cellar. Even if we have a below average sap season, we will have sweetener for the year to come.