

STONY KILL ALMANAC

BY AND ABOUT
Stony Kill Environmental Education Center

[Calendar of Events Inside](#)

email: skfarm@gw.dec.state.ny.us

www.dec.state.ny.us

Short And Sweet

by Richard Parisio, Environmental Educator

According to a native American legend, the discovery of maple sugar happened by accident, like many other great discoveries: a hunter buried his tomahawk, in anger, into the trunk of a tree which turned out to be a sugar maple. When he pulled the blade free, a clear liquid began to drip from the wound. His wife gathered this sap and used it in place of water to cook the evening meal of corn porridge. As the porridge simmered a delicious smell spread through the air. When the hunter and his wife tasted it, they agreed that its wonderful flavor must come from the sap of this tree - and so a truly native American food tradition was born!

The sugar season is short — usually no more than a month or so — but sweet! So why not make the most of it this year, and welcome spring early by a making a little maple syrup of your own!

Whatever its actual origins, it's certain that native Americans taught the European settlers how to make maple sugar. The settlers brought new tools and methods to the process: they drilled holes, into which tubes, called *spiles*, were inserted, instead of cutting diagonal gashes into the tree as native people had done. Settlers hung buckets to

collect the sap, in place of the bark containers used by native people, and boiled it in cast iron cauldrons hung over a fire, whereas the native way was to use heated stones placed in a wooden trough with the sap to boil it. Time and ingenuity led to further improvements in efficiency: evaporators that use a stainless steel pan fitted over a wood, oil, or gas burning furnace, called an *arch*, plastic tubing to conduct the sap from the trees to collection tanks, even reverse osmosis technology to reduce sap to syrup.

Despite all of the technological innovations, the basic process of maple sugaring remains unchanged, as essentially simple as it is labor intensive. To start with, the would- be sugarmaker must be able to identify her maples: sugar maple (*Acer saccharum*), and black maple (*Acer nigrum*) are the only two maple species used commercially. Both yield sap that contains 2-3 % sugar, the product of photosynthesis in the leaves during the previous growing season.

(Continued on page 6)

**STONY KILL
ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION
CENTER**

Main Telephone Number: 845-831-8780

Office Hours

Monday - Friday, 8:45 AM to 4:30 PM
Saturday, 9:30 AM to 4:30 PM
Sunday, (April, May, June, September, October)
1:00 PM to 4:00 PM
CLOSED ON ALL MAJOR HOLIDAYS
Grounds - Open seven days a week from
sunrise to sunset

EDUCATION STAFF

Reba W. Laks, Director, ext 303
James Herrington, Environmental Educator, ext 305
Rich Parisio, Environmental Educator, ext 302
Christopher O'Sullivan, Environmental Educator, ext 327
Cindy Simpson, Regional WET Coordinator, ext 321
Susan Kmiotek, Office Manager, ext 300

OPERATIONS STAFF

Ed Higgs, General Mechanic, ext 307
Jason Yaekel, Maintenance, ext 308
Cindy Laccone, Maintenance, ext 308

FORESTRY STAFF

Barbara Lucas-Wilson, Forester, ext 309
Lou Sebesta, Urban Forester, ext 316

STONY KILL FOUNDATION, INC.

Tina Cianciulli, Office Manager, ext 310

Board of Directors

Tony Riccobono, President
Denise VanBuren, Vice President
Richard Lahey, Chairman
Art McCormack, Treasurer
Alexandra Koppen, Corresponding Secretary
Ed Connelly, Recording Secretary
Paul Adams Laurie Harvey
Patricia Lovette Joel Miller
William Reiner Betty Strang

Stony Kill Almanac is a quarterly publication and program listing of Stony Kill Farm EEC events.

Richard Parisio, Editor
Susan Kmiotek, Production

FROM THE DIRECTOR'S DESK

by Reba W. Laks, Director

New Multi-Purpose Building Soon to be Completed

Construction on the new building has proceeded at a good pace. Projected completion date is mid January, though one never knows for sure what complications may arise.

The building is situated behind the Manor House. It is a wood-frame building with board and baton siding and stone facing along the bottom. It incorporates several Green Design techniques such as the geothermal heating system. (More about geothermal and Green Design in a future newsletter). The building was designed to blend in with the surroundings and to not obstruct or take away from the historic Manor House.

There are several features of note. An entrance hall and reception area lead into a main room that is 27 feet wide by 53 feet long, and seats approximately 80 people (assembly style seating). The room also divides into two smaller classroom size meeting/teaching spaces. The room will have two small sinks, cabinets and storage spaces, as well as audio-visual, phone and computer connections. Other areas include a kitchenette, mens' and ladies' bathrooms, janitor's closet and small exhibit area as well a space for a possible small gift shop. Another nice feature will be the porch along the south-facing side of the building. This will overlook the backyard behind the Manor House. Bird watching and other activities will be able to be done outdoors but under overhead cover. (Continued next page)

(New Building continued from page 2)

The building affords many possibilities for future programs and uses. No longer will we need to worry about whether or not to cancel an event because of weather concerns. We will now have sufficient indoor space to move things inside if need be. In the farmstead area, we have the barn classroom for bringing a class of children inside if it begins to rain or get cold. Currently, it has been a problem up near the Manor House as all the rooms in the House are too small for a full-sized class. With the addition of the new building, we will have the option of moving programs inside if the weather becomes too cold or rainy to continue outdoors. We will now also have the space for larger-scale lectures, discussions and meetings.

In the spring, we will plan a grand opening. I hope that you will all be able to join us at that time.



FOOD DRIVE

Stony Kill has set up collection boxes in the Manor House. All donations will be given to the Salvation Army food pantry in Beacon, NY. Suggested donations are: Cereal, Peanut butter and jelly, soup, spaghetti sauce and spaghetti, Spaghetti O's, juice, baby food and formula. Call Sue for details at 845-831-8780, ext 300.

Garden Update!

By Paula Monetti, Wacky Weeder

Another bountiful season comes to an end in the Verplanck Memorial Perennial Garden. The "Wacky Weeder" volunteers who maintain the garden wish to thank the generous donors who contributed to the much needed gardening tools and the repair and painting of the white picket fence, as well as flowers. The garden will surely be enjoyed for years to come.

The perennial garden continues to attract new as well as returning visitors, both young and old, who enjoy strolling among the wide variety of bushes and flowers, observing the wonderful birds and butterflies, or simply resting for a few peaceful moments on a garden bench. We look forward to seeing everyone again in the spring time!



HOLIDAY OPEN HOUSE

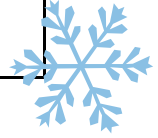
Thursday, December 28

Noon-4:00 PM

Bird exhibit
Tours of the Manor House,
hayrides, kids activities.
Refreshments and decorations
at the Manor House
courtesy of the
Verplanck Garden Club.

SLATE OF PUBLIC PROGRAMS

We welcome those who have any type of physical challenge to all of our programs.
If you call ahead to let us know your needs, we will be happy to learn how we can best serve you.



DECEMBER

Saturday, December 2 2:00 PM

Who Went There?

Join us on a leisurely winter trail walk, focusing on animal tracks and other traces of wildlife activity.

Saturday, December 9 2:00 PM

Hibernators, Migrators, and Deep, Deep Sleepers

Find out about the many ingenious strategies plants and animals use to survive the winter, and how climate change may be affecting the ecology of our local ecosystems.

Saturday, December 16 2:00 PM

Hudson River Cleanup Day

Come prepared to leave a place along the river cleaner than you found it. Location and time TBA - call Stony Kill in early December for details.

Saturday, December 23 2:00 PM

Holiday Trailwalk

Get some exercise during this holiday season. Join us for a brisk walk up the Verplanck Ridge Trail. The leafless trees will reveal their hidden secrets of birds' nests, berries and winter views.



Saturday, December 30 2:00 PM

Open Barn

Get a behind-the-scenes tour of the barn. Enjoy an up-close view of our cows, pigs, chickens, sheep and turkeys. Learn what they eat and how they stay warm for the winter.



JANUARY

Saturday, January 6 2:00 PM

The Return of the River Otter

Get acquainted with everyone's favorite aquatic mammal, and learn about NY's Otter Restoration Project.

Saturday, January 13 2:00 PM

Trail Cleanup Day at Stony Kill

Grab your hand pruners or loppers, work gloves, and hiking boots, and help us get our trails in shape for cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, and winter hiking. A great way to burn off those extra holiday calories!

Saturday, January 20 2:00 PM

Snowshoe Walk

Come explore as we make tracks in the snow! Invite your family, dress warmly and bring your snowshoes. Don't have snowshoes? We'll loan you a pair for free! Winter hike if snow is scarce.

Saturday, January 27 2:00 PM

Winter Bird Wander

Come and enjoy a walk in the woods, and get reacquainted with our non-migratory feathered friends. Bring binoculars, if you have them.



FEBRUARY

Saturday, February 3 2:00 PM

Punxsutawney Phil and Friends

Just what do groundhogs do? Do they chuck wood? Come and learn the habits of woodchucks.

Saturday, February 10 2:00 PM

Hudson River Eagle Watch

When there is ice on the river, bald eagles often gather at where there is none, giving us an excellent chance of viewing these magnificent raptors. Call for details - time and meeting place.

Saturday, February 17 2:00 PM

Verplanck Ridge Hike

Join us on a 1.5 mile hike through mixed hardwoods and open fields. Enjoy some great views of Mount Beacon and the Fishkill ridge.

Saturday, February 24 2:00 PM

Barking up the Wrong Tree?

Learn how to identify trees in the winter, using bark, twig, and bud features, and taste some sweet birch tea!



A GLANCE AT MARCH

Saturday, March 3 2:00 PM

Bears in the Neighborhood

Saturday, March 10 2:00 PM

Close Encounters of the *Bird* Kind

Saturday, March 17 2:00 PM

Leaping Leprechauns!

Saturday, March 24 2:00 PM

Backyard Maple Sugaring

Saturday, March 31 2:00 PM

Attack of the Invasives



SHOES AND SKIS

Stony Kill has an assortment of snowshoes for rent by the public. If it's your first time and you need a little help, our staff would be happy to show you! Many folks enjoy cross-country skiing as well through our fields and trails, but you'll need to bring your own skis. Not only is this great exercise, it's something you can do with the whole family!

Have some fun -- venture outdoors this winter and take advantage of the beautiful landscape, wildlife and peace and quiet! Fee: \$3.00/pair.

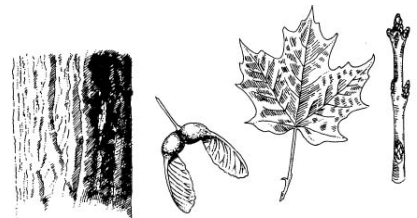
(Short and Sweet Continued from page 1)

This means that 30 to 40 gallons of sap, on average, must be boiled down to make one gallon of syrup. Red maple, our other common species, can also be tapped, but it is not commercially feasible to do so, as its sap contains only about half as much sugar as that of the sugar and black maples

After a sugar or black maple has been identified (easiest when the leaves are present but still possible using bud and bark features), the sugarmaker drills a 7/16" hole into the tree, no more than one hole for each twelve inches in the tree's diameter, anywhere from two to four feet or so above the ground, at a slight upward angle, about 2.5 inches deep. A spile is then inserted into the hole, and gently but firmly tapped into place with a hammer. Spiles can be made by cutting copper or plastic tubing into short lengths, then sawing slots into one end of each length and squeezing with pliers to form a taper, for a snug fit. A more rustic method is to cut sections of staghorn sumach twigs and poke out the soft pith to form spiles, which can be then be tapered by whittling. Any sort of clean, food grade plastic or metal jug or bucket can be adapted to hang below the tap and collect the sap. For the less enterprising, used or new sap buckets with matching lids, either aluminum or galvanized, along with metal spiles, are also available for sale: contact the NYS Maple Producers Association at shahill@catskill.net for sources.

Sap, like milk, spoils quickly, and must be boiled within three days. There are almost as many kinds of boiling, or "sugaring off" systems, as there are sugarmakers. For the individual who wishes to tap a few trees and make a gallon or so of syrup for his own use, a simple backyard arch using cement blocks or an old 55 gallon drum can be used to hold a wood fire, over which a large pan or pot full of sap is placed. Even a turkey roasting pan can be used. Once the sap begins to thicken and take on an amber color, it can be transferred to a sauce pan and finished over the kitchen stove. It's officially syrup when its temperature reaches 7.5 degrees Fahrenheit above the boiling point of water.

The sugar maple, our state tree, is found almost everywhere in New York. The last days of winter and earliest days of spring are traditionally the season for maple sugaring. Sap runs in recent years have occurred much earlier, however, often as early as late January. The time to tap is determined by the weather, which must be frosty at night but above freezing during the day. In southern New York, that typically begins in late February or early March—a good seasonal marker is the return of red-winged blackbirds to their nests.



The sugar season is short—usually no more than a month or so— but sweet! So why not make the most of it this year, and welcome spring early by a making a little maple syrup of your own! It will taste all the sweeter for the time you will spend outdoors, and the hard work you will put into it.

SPLASH'S PAGE

The Official Page of Stony Kill's Mascot,
Splash the River Otter

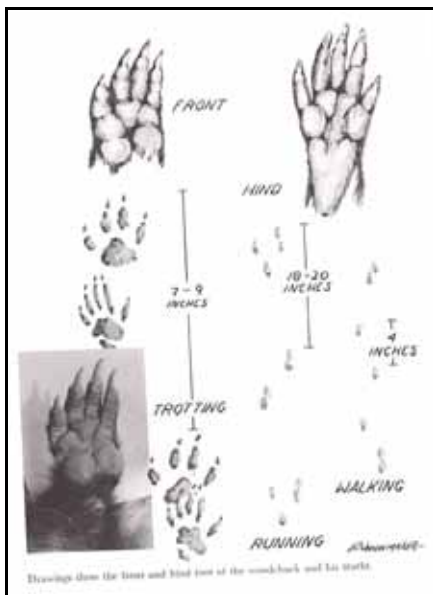


Splash would like to introduce you to a friend of his *Marmota monax*,” also known as the woodchuck. The name woodchuck comes from a Cree Indian word, *wuchak*, which apparently was used to identify several different animals of similar size and color.

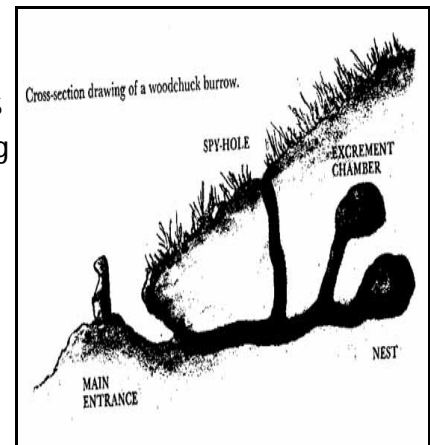


Woodchucks are also called groundhogs, and are rodents, like squirrels. Groundhogs have excellent eye sight and are able to climb trees in order to escape enemies.

Woodchucks have 4 toes on their front paws and 5 toes on their hind paws. The legs and paws are well designed for digging.



The groundhog is one of only three true hibernators in NYS (the other two are the jumping mouse and little brown bat). They rely solely on their body fat to survive the winter. A woodchucks' metabolic rate or heartbeat slows considerably from more than 100 beats per minute to as few as 15 per minute. Their body temperature drops from about 97°F to about 40°F and breathing slows to about once every six minutes.



Many people consider the groundhog a “varmint” due to the extensive holes they dig, and the damage they do to crops and gardens.

However, you may want consider that woodchucks are beneficial in moderate numbers. Their special excrement chamber fertilizes the earth. Their digging loosens and aerates the soil, letting in moisture and organic matter while bringing up subsoil for transformation into top soil. In NYS woodchucks turn over 1.6 million tons of soil each year!

ATTENTION: In an effort to reduce waste and the cost of production and mailing of the Almanac, Stony Kill is asking our readers if they would check out www.dec.state.ny.us on our website for current and past issues of the Almanac rather than receiving a hard copy in the mail.

This may be your last hard copy of the Stony Kill Almanac. Please take a moment to complete the following questions.

Q YES Q NO Would you like to receive an email notification each quarter when the current issue of the Almanac is posted and ready to read on our website?
If yes, please write your email address here: _____

Q YES Q NO Would you still like to receive a hard copy, in the mail? If yes, is your name and mailing address correct as it appears on the mailing label? _____

If you DO NOT NEED electronic notification of when we post our current newsletter, you do not need to respond to this questionnaire. Here are four easy steps to accessing Stony Kill's webpages. Go to www.dec.state.ny.us then click on SERVICES and then click on EDUCATION CENTERS and then click on Stony Kill Environmental Education Center. If there are any other comments or questions you have, please send them along to us at Stony Kill.

PRSRRT STD
US POSTAGE
PAID
ALBANY, NY
PERMIT #598

NYS Department of Environmental Conservation
Bureau of Environmental Education
STONY KILL FARM ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION CENTER
79 Farmstead Lane, Wappingers Falls, NY 12590

