The real thing from Shaker Village goes from its trees to its tables

By Sharon Thompson

Guests who eat breakfast at Shaker Village of Pleasant Hill probably don’t even give a second thought to the syrup that covers their stacks of pancakes. But if they ask, they’ll get a history lesson.

The maple syrup — which is sold in 1-ounce bottles for $3.38 — is produced on the property the same way the Shakers did in the 1800s. The Shakers at Pleasant Hill tapped the maple trees, but not to a great extent, said Ralph E. Ward, museum program and agritourism manager. “It was not always successful. It was greatly dependent on the winter variations in the temperature.”

“Process was much more common in the Northeast,” Ward said, “where the harsh winters require tapping the trees and collecting the sap.”

Syrup making is a much better product,” Ward said, adding that Shaker Village has been making syrup for the past five years as an interpretive program. The yield is about 10 to 15 gallons of finished syrup each spring. “Since the basic process is quite simple, cooking down (reducing) is pretty no-special-training required. That being said, experience results in a much better product,” Ward said. Among the Shakers, tapping the trees and collecting the sap was men’s work, he explained. The processing/cooking would be done by the women.

Maple syrup breakfasts are served 7:30 to 10 a.m. Saturdays during March. The Shaker Village’s 100 percent pure maple syrup is served at its pancake breakfasts and is available for purchase.

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Get your green on by adding absinthe

By Mary Ann Anderson

For St. Patrick’s Day, why not go beyond Irish inventions such as corned beef, potatoes and soda bread? Instead think about cooking with absinthe, the green and sometimes most hip ingredient in the United States in 1807 for the first time since it was banned at the turn of the 20th century.

Often called the “green fairy” because of its supposed hallucinogenic effects — part of the reason it is nicknamed absinth — it was prohibited here and in Europe until 1915. Its licorice-like flavor is used in anisette, licorice to foods with its black licorice flavor.

“Striped-out, the flavor of absinthe is very anise-licorice,” said Heather Schmitt-Gonzalez, culinary expert, food writer and author of the Girlfish food blog. “But when used in cooking, it lends a filling whisper of anise to a variety dishes and ingredients.”

While there are several absinthe brands on the market, the original and most authentic is Pernod, and Maraschino, both of Neuchâtel, who blended the concoction from plants she found in the mountains. It soon made its way to a French doctor, who needed absinthe to kill bacteria.

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