

# Mild winter triggers early maple sugar season

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Lighter than normal snow accumulation, warmer than normal temperatures earlier in the season and an earlier than normal start of the maple syrup season are making some weather watchers wonder if there is a new “normal.”

The light winter and smaller snow pack could defuse the threat of spring flooding, and syrup producers are early in tapping maples, say University of Maine Cooperative Extension scientists.

Extension educator and [maple syrup](#) expert Kathy Hopkins in the Somerset County office in Skowhegan says most sap harvesters began tapping last weekend, and some are already boiling sap into syrup. She predicts a healthy maple syrup season, barring sudden and extreme warm weather, which could force an early end to the season without the usual snow cover that helps keep the environment cool and constant in the woods. “It’s a little early,” she says, “but if it stays with temperatures like this, we’ll be good.”

Unseasonably warm temperatures also could harm fruit trees, according to Renae Moran, Extension fruit tree specialist at Highmoor Farm in Monmouth. Temperatures rising above 50 degrees can accelerate budding and flowering, she says, and early-blooming buds could be killed by a severe freeze.

“An early spring is always a concern to fruit growers because trees bloom around the time of the last killing frost,” she says. “When bloom

occurs early, the chance of a killing frost is much greater.”

A less than normal snowpack may reduce spring flooding, and groundwater levels are healthy because of late season rains in 2011, says John Jemison, an Extension soil and water quality specialist.

Both Jemison and Extension water quality scientist Laura Wilson in Orono say it’s still possible for Maine to receive a severe snowstorm before spring officially arrives.

“The last several winters on average have been warmer and drier than what we are used to,” Jemison says. “Last year was very snowy, but the previous few were more like this. I think this is more like the winter of our future.”

Provided by University of Maine

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