

# HIGHLAND COUNTY MAPLE FESTIVAL



The Highland County Maple Festival (March 14–15 and 21–22, 2026) is Virginia's premier maple event, featuring 10+ working sugar camps, all-you-can-eat pancake meals, and over 100 arts/crafts vendors. Top attractions include touring historic sugar camps like [Back Creek Farms](#), eating hot maple doughnuts, and exploring the town of Monterey.

## Tips for Your Visit

- **Bring Cash/Checks:** Some of the vendors may not accept credit cards OR cell service may be limited.
- **Date & Time:** The festival is held over the second and third weekends of March. Hours are typically 9 AM–5 PM on Saturdays and **9 AM–4 PM on Sundays**.
- **Admission & Cost:** Admission is **\$5.00** (Monterey buildings only)
- **Logistics:** Dress in layers and wear boots, as camps can be muddy.
- **Location:** The event takes place throughout Highland County, primarily centered in Monterey and McDowell.
- **Plan Ahead:** The festival takes place in March in Highland County, Virginia, with many camps operating on both Saturday and Sunday.
- **Mix Methods:** Combine a visit to a traditional camp (like Rexrode) with a modern one (like Puffenbarger) for the full experience.
- **Beyond the Camp:** Stop by the Highland High School for craft shows and, "maple milkshakes".
- **Food:** Don't miss, "maple donuts" near the Highlander in Monterey and, "pork rinds".

## Highland County Maple Festival Trivia

The [Highland County Maple Festival](#), held annually in Monterey, VA, since 1958.

- **Origins**
  - Founded in 1958 after a pharmaceutical rep suggested it to a local doctor, initially having no craft vendors—just sugar.
  - As Virginia's official maple festival, it is the second-largest in the U.S., featuring 10+ sugar camps, over 150 arts/crafts vendors, and famous maple donuts.
- **Economic Impact**
  - The 2023 festival generated over \$2.4 million in direct spending for the county.
- **Tiny Town, Big Crowd**
  - The festival takes place in a county with only ~2,200 residents, which expands to over 60,000+ visitors to celebrate the "opening of the trees".
- **Sugar Camps**
  - Over 10 sugar camps open to the public for tours.
- **Famous Donuts**
  - The **Mill Gap Ruritan Club** sells tens of thousands of their signature maple-glazed doughnuts over the two weekends. The Mill Gap Ruritan Club sells their famous maple donuts during the annual [Highland County Maple Festival](#) in Monterey, Virginia. Their dedicated trailer is typically located in the large parking lot behind High's Restaurant. They operate during both weekends of the festival, often starting as early as 6:00 a.m. – *"Remember that all maple donuts aren't the same. The Mill Gap Ruritans have yeast donuts while some of the others are cake. No comparison in my humble opinion."*

- **Dates**
  - The 66th annual event is scheduled for March 14-15 and **March 21-22, 2026.**
- **Local Legacy**
  - The festival is held in Monterey, McDowell, and Blue Grass, Virginia, and is a designated "Local Legacy" by the Library of Congress.

## Top Sugar Camps to Visit

For the 2026 Highland County Maple Festival in Virginia, top-rated, must-visit sugar camps include [Back Creek Farms](#) (known for friendly owners and variety), [Puffenbarger's Sugar Orchard](#) (excellent for modern production), and [Rexrode's Sugar Orchard](#) (traditional, six-generation operation). [Laurel Fork Sapsuckers](#) is highly recommended for educational tours and maple BLTs, while [Duff's Sugar House](#) offers a historic, wood-fired experience.

- **Puffenbarger Sugar Orchard (Blue Grass):** Offers an in-depth, modern look at the "new way" to boil and make syrup.
- **Rexrode's Sugar Orchard (Monterey):** A six-generation family-operated, traditional, wood-fired camp. Located north of Hightown on Rt. 637 (Maple Sugar Road).
  - At Rexrode's Sugar Orchard, six generations of syrup makers invite visitors to interact with the syrup making process. Get up close to **large 200-year-old maple trees** and view different wood-fired evaporation methods, including the old-fashioned open-pan system, as well as a modern style evaporator. Food and a variety of maple products are available, including maple cotton candy. Tour buses welcome. Wheelchair accessible. **CASH/CHECK ONLY.**
- **Duff's Sugar House:** Known for traditional wood-fired, "iron kettle" cooking.
- **Back Creek Farms:** Frequently recommended for its hospitality and diverse product range.
- **Laurel Fork Sapsuckers (Hightown):** Features educational tours and a, "snack shack" serving, "maple BLTs".

## Maple Sugar Facts

- **Production**
  - Freezing nights and warm, sunny days make ideal weather conditions for harvesting sugar water.
  - Correct tapping methods cause no permanent damage to the maple sugar tree.
  - A good tree will produce 20 quarts of "sugar water" in 12 hours.
  - It takes approximately 40 quarts of sugar water to make one quart of maple syrup.
- **Composition**
  - Sugar water collected from maple trees is made up of approximately 98% water and 2% sugar.
  - Maple syrup is 33.5% water and 66.5% sugar.
- **Grades** – Pure Maple Syrup is sold by shades of "amber." Light amber water is collected early season and dark amber water is collected late season.
  - Light Amber has a fine, delicate flavor.
  - Medium Amber has a richer flavor and is most frequently used as table syrup.
  - Dark Amber is used for cooking, or as a table syrup by those who prefer a strong maple flavor.
- **Storage**
  - Unopened containers of maple syrup should be stored in a cool, dry place.

- Store opened containers of syrup in the refrigerator or freezer.
- Maple syrup can also be frozen.
- **Nutrition**
  - Maple Syrup only has 40 calories per tablespoon. Honey has 45, white sugar has 55, and corn sugar has 60.
  - Pure maple syrup contains no preservatives, capsule artificial flavoring or color.
  - Pure maple syrup is FAT FREE!
  - Maple Syrup contains iron, potassium, magnesium, and phosphorus. It also has a higher calcium content than milk. It also contains small amounts of amino acids, proteins, and vitamins B2, B5, and niacin.