

# On a Mission to Make Maple Syrup Part of Every Meal

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Chef Jacob Griffin may have the coolest job in the world. He doesn't push papers, nor does he toil at a desk in a fluorescent-lit office. He works in a test kitchen for [Crown Maple](#) in Dover Plains, in the heart of the Hudson Valley, where the forests are thick with maple trees.

Griffin has one big task to perform: Convince the world that maple syrup isn't just for pancakes (or even limited to breakfast).

On any given day, you'll find him tinkering in what Crown Maple owners Robb and Lydia Turner call the Sugar House, drizzling syrup on crispy fish tacos or glazing pulled pork. Two years after the company launched in 2010, the Turners wisely opened their sprawling estate, Madava Farms, to the public on weekends for tastings and tours of the production facility. (Madava also doubles as an event space.) Compton Chase-Lansdale, Crown Maple's chief executive, says business has more than doubled every year since 2011.

The Medicine Man with lemon juice and sage.



Crown Maple's marketing strategy starts with the sleek bottle holding the upscale syrup--it looks more like top-shelf liquor than a waffle condiment. But the real plan involves pursuing smart product collaborations that both show off Crown Maple's versatility and add a hip factor. So the company has teamed up with the likes of [Brooklyn chocolate maker](#) Mast Brothers, Irving Farm coffee roasters, Blue Marble ice cream, Newburgh Brewing Company, and Michelin-rated Eleven Madison Park restaurant, to name just a few.

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## Untapped Potential

Unlike most maple syrups found in grocery stores, which are corn syrup-based, Crown Maple originates out there in the maple-thick forests. The tapping is done under a vacuum, explains Chase-Lansdale, which allows for a faster

flow of sap from the tree to the collection point. The company filters the sap to remove extraneous materials such as mold and bacteria. Then the sap goes into large-scale boiling tanks, from which it follows a series of channels that evaporate more water. After a final (and somewhat volcanic) filtration process, the finished syrup receives a formal tasting before it goes in a barrel.

With 50,000 taps scattered across Madava, Chase-Lansdale estimates Crown Maple produces about 20,000 gallons a year, or 400 barrels of syrup--not too shabby for a business that bottles to order. "We'll take a barrel that we believe is consistent with an order, open it, do a tasting to confirm the quality, color, and other aspects of the maple," he says, proving his point.

Now that is some artisanal syrup.

But the question is how to broaden the market for the stuff, and this is where Griffin comes in.

A view from Madava.



The Culinary Institute of America-trained chef was [running a kitchen](#) before he left for his job at Madava. Yet while he credits the Hudson Valley and local foods with his inspiration, his work tends to be more collaborative. On the not-so-rare occasions he's in the city, he'll stop by a client like Eleven Madison Park, thank the chef for using Crown Maple, and then offer ideas for how to integrate the product into the current menu. If the chef is open to it, he'll happily demonstrate. "If they're doing more salad, they can use different colors of maple in different dressings," Griffin says by way of example. "Right now, Eleven Madison Park is using maple in a granola dish."

For National Coffee Day on September 29, Griffin reached out to nearby Irving Farms to create [the Medicine Man](#), a cold twist on a classic cocktail with brewed ice coffee, herbs, maple syrup, a little bit of lemon juice, and sage. "It was an opportunity to showcase these really unique flavors," says the roaster's director of wholesale, Teresa von Fuchs. "All the people there are really passionate about maple in the way we're [passionate about coffee](#)."

Other popular pairings have included Blue Marble ice cream's [organic soft serve](#) made with maple syrup and Coolhaus's bacon-flecked [ice cream sandwich](#) topped with--you guessed it--maple syrup. "The more face time I have with the chefs, the more we can be inspired going back and forth with ideas," Griffin says. "I get to convey how exciting, how versatile the syrup is. I can make them try the maple, and the chefs know quality when they taste it."

It's a win-win situation for everyone involved. "All these great collaborations come out of the companies having the same values," says von Fuchs, noting how the organic nature of the partnerships speaks to small businesses' desire to support one another. One company helps the other get exposure, and in return, both get to demonstrate what sets them apart. It's also a chance "to showcase how diverse" the food movement among small businesses has become. "The more we can expand that across what we do," the more the brands stand to survive, she notes.

In an email, Denise Lee Yohn, [a brand-building expert](#) and author of *What Great Brands Do*, says what's smart about the collaboration strategy is that it positions Crown Maple as the go-to brand for more "in-the-know, discriminating customers." And the more partnerships the brand has, the more it looks like the leader--"or at least the more innovative and fresh one. Crown Maple is the news, not the restaurant or even the specific menu item."

"Each partnership is a little bit different," says Griffin, noting he never asks more of the businesses beyond a recommendation. "When we work with them, we want them to see the versatility of the maple, so they'll decide on their own how to use it. We'll just feed them with fun, new recipes."