

## Life History

Sassafras is one of the three species within the Lauraceae family and the only one that is native to eastern North America. It is also regarded as the most important due to its many purposes. When the Spanish arrived in Florida they discovered the tree and mistook it for a cinnamon tree which has given it the common name of Cinnamon Wood. The Native Americans used the Sassafras in medications which have been included in modern pharmacy. This plants reputation spread and is possibly the first plant from America to be used as a drug in the Old World. Once discovered to become a major colonial export. Not only was it used for medicine it was created into a tea, beer, dental antiseptic, the flavor was used for toothpaste, root beer, and gum. It was vastly used until the FDA banned it because it was found to be a carcinogen. Today the tree is used to produce herbal medicines, perfumery, and as a flavoring agent for candy, beverages, aromatic teas, and file powder (an important thickening ingredient in the Creole dish, file gumbo). (herbalist.com, 4)

## Works Cited

- (1) Grimm, William Carey, John T. Kartesz, and William Carey Grimm. "Laurel Family." *The Illustrated Book of Trees: the Comprehensive Field Guide to More than 250 Trees of Eastern North America*. Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole, 2002. Print
- (2) "Sassafras Albidum (Nutt." *Northeastern Area State & Private Forestry - USDA Forest Service*. Web. 19 Sept. 2011. <[http://www.na.fs.fed.us/pubs/silvics\\_manual/volume\\_2/sassafras/albidum.htm](http://www.na.fs.fed.us/pubs/silvics_manual/volume_2/sassafras/albidum.htm)>.
- (3) "Sassafras." *FCPS Home Page Redirect Page*. Web. 18 Sept. 2011. <<http://www.fcps.edu/islandcreekes/ecology/sassafras.htm>>.
- (4) *Sassafras*. Herbalist.com. Web. 18 Sept. 2011. <<http://www.herbalist.com/>>.
- (5) Reed, David. "Sassafras Albidum." *HORT 201 & 202 Home Page*. Web. 18 Sept. 2011. <<http://generalhorticulture.tamu.edu/prof/Recipes/File-Sassafras/sassafras.html>>.

## Sassafras



Sassafras albidum



Family: Lauraceae

Averie Kenney

## Geographical Range

Sassafras is native from:(2)  
Southwestern Maine west to  
New York  
Extreme southern Ontario  
Central Michigan  
Southwest in Illinois  
Extreme southeastern Iowa  
Missouri  
Southeastern Kansas  
Eastern Oklahoma  
Eastern Texas  
East to central Florida

\*Extinct in southeastern Wisconsin but is extending its range into northern Illinois

## Threats

Fire damage (2)  
Extreme Weather (2)  
Fungus (2)  
Actinopelte dryina  
Mycosphaerella sassafras  
Nectria canker  
Mistletoe  
Insects (2)  
Root borers  
Leaf feeders  
Sucking insects  
Wood-boring weevil  
Gypsy moth  
Looper  
Japanese beetle

## Fun Facts

\*There is Minimal threat to the Sassafras from the Emerald Green Ash Borer (2)  
\*Caterpillars such as the Eastern Tiger Swallow Tail eat the leaves(3)  
\*Used to make root beer  
\*Tea is a common drink in England

## Characteristics

Size: (1) small tree often 20 to 40 ft tall

Characteristics of leaves: (1)

3 to 6 inches long  
2 to 4 inches wide  
Alternate  
Simple  
Deciduous  
obovate to ovate

*Margins*

entire  
3 palmately veined

*Tips*

bluntly-pointed

*Bases*

wedge-shaped; glabrous and bright green above, paler and glabrous or slightly hairy beneath, variably shaped with three types often on the same branch, unlobed, 3-lobed, and some that are 2-lobed and mitten-shaped

Characteristics of stems:(5)

*Young stems*

Green then light brown and pencil sized

*Mature*

Dark brown and deeply ridged

Characteristics of flowers: (1)

About ¼ inch wide  
Born in loose terminal clusters  
Yellow to yellow green  
6-parted perianth  
Corolla lacking  
Perfect- male and female flowers are produced on separate trees

Characteristics of Fruit:(1)

3/8 to ½ inch long  
Small  
Berrylike  
Dark blue  
Shiny  
Each borne in a cuplike structure  
Produced on a club-shaped, bright red stalk



## Uses (1)

Lumber in furniture  
Fruit/Seeds  
Oils  
Flavoring in candy  
Tobacco  
Medicines  
Perfume soaps



What type of leaves are on a Sassafras branch?

- A) Unlobed
- B) 2-lobed
- C) 3-lobed
- D) All of the above