

Common name: **Sassafras**

Genus Species: ***Sassafras albidum***



Photo credit: USDA Forest Service, SRS, Bugwood.org

**Description:** Sassafras is a perennial deciduous shrub or tree. The trees are 30 to 60 feet tall. Male and female flowers grow on separate plants. Leaves are variable in shape and may have two or three lobes, or none. The two-lobed leaves are mitten-shaped, and include both right- and left-handed mittens.

**Habitats:** This plant is a pioneer tree on disturbed sites in its native range. It can be found in woodlands, fields, and along roadsides.

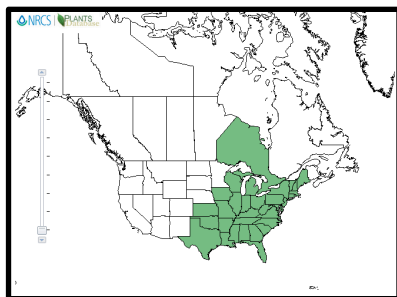
**Phenology highlight:** Leaf buds appear at the same time as the flowers in the spring.

### Species facts

- Sassafras is pollinated by butterflies and native bees.
- Birds, including quail, pileated woodpeckers, and yellowthroat warblers, eat sassafras fruits and disperse the seeds. Bears and other animals eat the fruit, bark, and wood.
- Native Americans used roots, bark, leaves, new shoots, and pith for a wide variety of purposes including medicinal treatments and flavoring for food.
- Sassafras has been cultivated since 1630 for its leaves, bark, and wood for use in tea, oil, and soap.



Photo credit: Dow Gardens Archive, Bugwood.org



**Why observe this species?** Sassafras is one of the plant species observed by New York Phenology Project member organizations. The mission of this public participation in science research initiative is to educate and engage the public while collecting data that is useful for detecting broad scale patterns in the natural world.

**Tip for observing this species:** When sassafras first flowers in the spring, get close or use binoculars to look among the open flowers for breaking leaf buds that are just showing the green tips of the leaves.

Map credit: USDA, NRCS. 2014. The PLANTS Database <http://plants.usda.gov>, 10 September 2014). National Plant Data Team, Greensboro, NC 27401-4901 USA

For more information about phenology and the New York Phenology Project (NYPP), please visit the NYPP website ([www.nyphenologyproject.org](http://www.nyphenologyproject.org)) and the USA-NPN website ([www.usanpn.org](http://www.usanpn.org)).



## Sassafras (*Sassafras albidum*)

**Note:** leaf, flower, and fruit phenophases are nested so you may need to record more than one phenophase for each; for example, if you record **Y** for "open flowers" you should also record **Y** for "flowers or flower buds."



### Breaking leaf buds

One or more breaking leaf buds are visible. A leaf bud is "breaking" once a green leaf tip is visible at the end of the bud, but before the first leaf from the bud has unfolded to expose the leaf stalk (petiole).



**Leaves** One or more live unfolded leaves are visible. A leaf is "unfolded" once its full length has emerged from the breaking bud so that the leaf stalk (petiole) is visible at its point of attachment to the stem. Do not include fully dried or dead leaves.

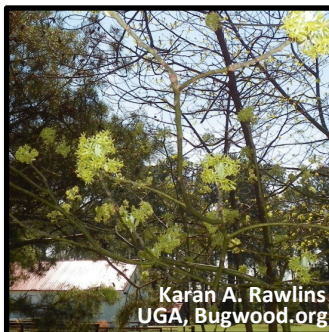


### Increasing leaf size

A majority of leaves have not reached their full size and are still growing larger. Do not include new leaves that continue to emerge at the ends of elongating stems throughout the growing season.



**Colored leaves** One or more leaves (including any that have recently fallen) have turned to their late-season colors, or changed color due to drought or pests. Do not include dried or dead leaves that remain on the plant.



### Flowers or flower buds

One or more fresh open or unopened flowers or flower buds are visible on the plant. Include flower buds that are still developing, but do not include wilted or dried flowers.



**Open flowers** One or more open fresh flowers are visible. Flowers are "open" when the reproductive parts (male stamens or female pistils) are visible between open flower parts. Do not include wilted or dried flowers.



**Fruits** One or more fruits are visible on the plant. For sassafras, the fruit is berry-like and changes from green to red-green to purplish-red to blue-black.



**Ripe fruits** One or more ripe fruits are visible on the plant. For sassafras, a fruit is considered ripe when it has turned blue-black.

Phenophases not pictured: **Falling leaves; Recent fruit or seed drop**