PLANT FACT SHEET

Sassafras albidum (Nuttall) Nees

GENUS *Sassafras* **FAMILY** Lauraceae

COMMON NAMES American sassafras, Ague tree, Fennel Wood

EDIBLE PARTS AND USES

Edible parts: Root, Leaves, Bark

CAUTION The safrole which gives flavour to root beer can cause cancer, but it is only one fourteenth as carcinogenic as ethanol in ordinary beer.
The oil from the roots is used to flavour root beer.
The roots are added to maple syrup and brewed into a tea.
The spicy bark of the trunk and roots is dried and used for flavouring.
The leaves are used for tea. They are also added to soups. The young buds are eaten.

DESCRIPTION

A small tree. It grows up to 20-30 m high. The trunk is 50 cm across. The branches are spreading, crooked and brittle. The bark is orange-brown. The leaves are alternate and simple. The leaves fall off during the year. The leaves are 10-15 cm long. They have a blunt tip and the base is wedge shaped. The leaves have 3 prominent veins. There may be 1, 2 or 3 lobes to the leaf. Leaves turn yellow or red in autumn. They have a spicy odour when bruised. The flowers are small and greenish-yellow. The male and female flowers are often on separate trees. They occur in loose clusters at the base of new shoots. These are 5 cm long. The fruit are like berries. They are 10-15 mm long and dark blue. They have one large stone-like seed. The fruit is in a red cup on a long red stalk.

HABITAT

It is a temperate plant. It grows naturally in thickly wooded areas in Eastern North America. It can grow on a variety of soils. It can tolerate shade. It grows on the edges of mixed forests. It cannot tolerate alkaline soils. It suits hardiness zones 5-9.

PRODUCTION

Cultivation

Plants are grown from suckers from the roots. They can also be grown by seeds or cuttings.

Harvesting and Seed Production

It is only a short lived plant.

NOTES

There are 3 Sassafras species.

PICTURES



Credit: Food Plants International (Bruce French)



Credit: Food Plants International (Bruce French)



Credit: Food Plants International (Bruce French)

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