

Sassafras



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WHAT'S IN A NAME?



Sassafras comes from a French word meaning "stone-breaking." It is also called "fennelwood" because of the strong smell that comes from all parts of the tree. The Lenape word for sassafras was "winakw," though the meaning is unknown.

FRIENDLY NEIGHBORS



The fruit of the sassafras tree is eaten by many animals, including turkeys, woodpeckers, other birds, rabbits, and squirrels. Beavers and white-tailed deer eat the bark of the tree.

HOME, SWEET, HOME



Sassafras needs lots of water and rich soil to survive. The branches tend to spread out, so it grows best in open, shady spaces. Sassafras can be identified by its strong smell, and by its very unusual leaves, which come in three different shapes: **unilobed**, **bilobed**, and **trilobed**, all of which can be found on a single branch!

Key Words



Unilobed - Having one round part

Bilobed - Having two round parts

Trilobed - Having three round parts

Steep - To put (something) in a liquid for a period of time

Extract - A substance that you get from something by using a machine or chemicals

Gumbo - A thick soup made in the southern U.S. with meat or seafood and usually okra

HUMAN USES



Native Americans used the sassafras as medicine. The leaves were rubbed on open wounds, different parts of the plant were used to treat skin conditions, cough, and fever, and the bark was **steeped** in hot water to make a delicious tea. The bark was also used to make a dye and for flavoring foods. The natural oils in the wood made it great for starting fires. Modern Americans used the bark in the popular soft drink root beer. Today, sassafras is no longer a key ingredient in root beer, but some brands still use an **extract** from the plant for flavoring. The main use of sassafras today is to make a spicy powder for **gumbo**.



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