

Sassafras albidum

Sassafras

Tried and True
Native Plant Selections
for the Mid-Atlantic



Master Gardeners of Northern Virginia
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Sassafras offers three-season interest: globelike clusters of chartreuse flowers in spring, leaves with three distinct shapes, dark blue fruit in red cups in summer, and foliage ranging from orange to crimson to purple in fall. This [native](#) is common in wood edges throughout the Mid-Atlantic Region except for the northern border of Pennsylvania.

Tree	Saplings, Flowers, Leaf Shapes, Fall Foliage
Height: 35–50 feet	
Spread: 35–50 feet	
Bloom Color: Chartreuse yellow	
Characteristics	
Deciduous tree with an irregular, often twisted trunk and flat-topped crown; dioecious	
Alternate , pinnately veined , mitten-shaped, oval, or 3-lobed green leaves	
Fragrant flowers in terminal clusters on 2" stalks in April	
Shiny, dark blue egg-shaped drupes in a red cup attached to red, upright stalks on female trees	
Yellow, orange, crimson or purple fall color	
Can form thickets if suckers are not controlled	
Attributes	
Tolerates clay soil and drought; averse to transplantation due to large tap root	
No serious pests or diseases; deer seldom severely damage but may browse twigs & foliage	
Ethnobotanic uses; all parts spicy and aromatic	
Attracts birds, butterflies; larval host for Eastern Tiger and Spicebush Swallowtails and moths like Imperial, Io, Promethea, and Tulip-Tree Beauty	
Growing and Maintenance Tips	Excellent Replacement for
Soil Requirements : Rich, evenly moist	<i>Ailanthus altissima</i> - Tree of Heaven
Light Requirements : Sun, Partial Shade	<i>Broussonetia papyrifera</i> - Paper Mulberry
Water Requirements : Dry, Moist	<i>Morus alba</i> - White Mulberry
Use as specimen (remove root suckers to grow single trunk) or screen (allow plant to colonize)	<i>Sapium sebiferum</i> - Chinese Tallow Tree
Hardiness : USDA Zones 4–9	

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Images by Elaine Mills, U.S. National Arboretum and Nature Conservancy and by Mary Free (bottom left), private garden, CT



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