Sassafras

Sassafras albidum



Sassafras in fall
Photo courtesy of NetPS Plant Finder

Height: 50 feet

Spread: 30 feet

Sunlight: ○ ◐ ●

Hardiness Zone: 4

Other Names: Common Sassafras

Description:

A native woodland tree with interesting foliage shaped like hands or mittens, which turns a myriad of exciting fall colors; appreciates shade and grows well in deep woods; needs adequate moisture and shelter, protect from drying winds

Ornamental Features

Sassafras features delicate racemes of lightly-scented lemon yellow flowers at the ends of the branches in early spring before the leaves. It has light green deciduous foliage. The lobed leaves turn an outstanding scarlet in the fall. The furrowed brick red bark adds an interesting dimension to the landscape.



Sassafras in fall
Photo courtesy of NetPS Plant Finder

Landscape Attributes

Sassafras is a deciduous tree with a distinctive and refined pyramidal form. Its average texture blends into the landscape, but can be balanced by one or two finer or coarser trees or shrubs for an effective composition.

This tree will require occasional maintenance and upkeep, and is best pruned in late winter once the threat of extreme cold has passed. It is a good choice for attracting birds to your yard, but is not particularly attractive to deer who tend to leave it alone in favor of tastier treats. Gardeners should be aware of the following characteristic(s) that may warrant special consideration;

- Suckering

Sassafras is recommended for the following landscape applications;

- Shade
- Naturalizing And Woodland Gardens

Planting & Growing

Sassafras will grow to be about 50 feet tall at maturity, with a spread of 30 feet. It has a high canopy with a typical clearance of 6 feet from the ground, and should not be planted underneath power lines. As it matures, the lower branches of this tree can be strategically removed to create a high enough canopy to support unobstructed human traffic underneath. It grows at a medium rate, and under ideal conditions can be expected to live for 70 years or more.



Sassafras flowers
Photo courtesy of NetPS Plant Finder

This tree performs well in both full sun and full shade. It prefers to grow in average to moist conditions, and shouldn't be allowed to dry out. It is not particular as to soil type, but has a definite preference for acidic soils, and is subject to chlorosis (yellowing) of the foliage in alkaline soils. It is quite intolerant of urban pollution, therefore inner city or urban streetside plantings are best avoided. This species is native to parts of North America.