

TREE PROFILE

Corporación Ambiental La Pedregosa

Common Name: Sassafras	Scientific Name: <i>Ocotea cymbarum</i>	Family: Lauraceae
Region: From Colombia to Guyana and from Ecuador to Brasil	Size: Up to 25 meters tall and with a trunk diameter of 80 cm	Habitat: Grows in the inundation forest
Leaves: Simple, helicoidal, alternate, oblong, 19 x 5.5 cm	Bark: Externally smooth and fragrant when fresh	Phenology: Flowers in Sept. and Oct., seeds in May and June
Basic Density: On average 0.45	Foliage: Green with a thin texture	Propagation: By seeds (short lasting)

Uses: The Sassafras is an endangered multi-use tree that contains high value safrole oil. Related species of the same family have already been driven to extinction in North America, where the oil was used to make root beer in the 19th and early 20th centuries. It is being used as fuel and lamp oil in other countries, especially Brazil. Traditional medicines use both the oil and the bark in various preparations. The tree has fine and aromatic wood that is excellent for fine furniture, which made it popular in Europe. Besides furniture, the wood has also been used for general construction and for boat building. The seeds are quite large and a popular food source for scarlet macaws, toucans and parrots. These many uses mean that Sassafras has considerable folkloric interest as well.



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Growth: There are male and female Sassafras trees. Only females have seeds. The seeds are large with high moisture content (36 mm x 18 mm). They have to be germinated immediately after collection or they spoil. Collecting Sassafras seeds is a challenge, as female trees are often hard to find, and because the seeds ripen after the inundations begin, making access difficult. There are approximately 85 seeds in a kilogram. Seed collectors have to compete with birds, who like the seeds as food. The germination rate is often below 50%.

A has test-planted Sassafras inside existing cultivations, as the tree needs shade. It is too early to know whether the Sassafras will adapt to those conditions or not. It would appear that Sasafrás is of moderate growth, but experiments with fertilizers and biochar might accelerate the growth rate. With shade, these trees could definitely be planted in low lying areas and in savannahs that flood.

