**SASSAFRAS**

**Products:** Spice and condiment

**Plant Parts Used:** Leaves and bark of shoots and roots

**Sassafras** (*Sassafras albidum* [Nutt.] Nees) grows best in open woods on moist, well-drained, sandy loam soils and can be a pioneer species in old fields, along fences, and on dry ridges. It can be found in more than 28 States from Maine to Texas (shown in green on the map below) and has its largest forms in the Great Smoky Mountains. It is found commonly with sweetgum (*Liquidambar styraciflua*), flowering dogwood (*Cornus florida*), hickories (*Carya* spp.), oaks (*Quercus* spp.), and yellow poplar (*Liriodendron tulipifera*).

### Nontimber Uses

- Native Americans used sassafras as a tonic and herb to treat ailments and for food, furniture, and a variety of other purposes.
- Sassafras was one of the first cash crops exported from the Virginia Colony to Europe for its curative properties and as a beverage ingredient.
- Oil extracted from sassafras roots was once used to flavor root beer and baked goods.
- Sassafras leaves and roots are used for thickening soups, and its essential oils are used to scent soaps.
- Filé, a favored spice in Cajun cuisine, is made from dried and ground sassafras leaves.

### Markets

- There is little documentation of the markets for sassafras, but it has been of commercial value for a long time.
- The primary markets for sassafras are specialty health and culinary enterprises.
- Buyers of bulk, raw sassafras material for the spice trade are scattered across the country.
  - Firms can be found in Indiana, Michigan, California, and Colorado, and are not bound to be the source of the product.
  - Most of these firms are not readily identified or recognized as part of the forest products industry.

### Key Points

- Sassafras is an under-utilized and under-recognized tree species with economic value in specialty health and culinary sectors of the forest products industry.
- Since 2006, there has been an 8-percent decrease in the estimated average number of sassafras trees per acre of forest land across the species’ range.
- Most States within the range of sassafras exhibited a negative net change in volume since 2004.

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**Acknowledgments:** Literature review and tree species maps supporting this Science Update were contributed by Ben Addlestone, Thomas Metzger, Wenyu Gao, and John Munsell through a collaboration with Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University. A special thanks to Andy Hartsell for providing updated FIA data shown in the graphics.

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