

SASSAFRAS

Sassafras albidum (Nutt) Nees.

OTHER COMMON NAMES: Common sassafras, Saxifrax, Sassafras.

FORM: Commonly 40-50 feet high, trunk diameter 1-3 feet; shrubby at its northern limits; occasionally 100 feet tall in the South; trunk short, stout, soon breaking up into many more or less spreading and contorted branches forming a flat-topped, or a rounded-oblong, bushy crown.

BARK: Mature bark thick, reddish-brown, with deep furrows and flat-topped ridges crossed by horizontal cracks.

TWIGS: At first light yellow-green, pubescent, become glabrous, bright green, ultimately reddish-brown.

LEAVES: Alternate, simple, ovate or obovate, 4-6 inches long, 2-4 inches wide, entire, and acute at apex or 2-3 lobed, lobes broadly ovate, acute, with broad rounded sinuses, may vary on the same tree; thin, dull green above, paler and glabrous or pubescent below.

FLOWERS: Appear with the leaves; dioecious; borne in lax, pilose, few-flowered drooping racemes from the axils of large obovate bud scales, flowers are greenish-yellow in color.

FRUIT: A dark blue shiny drupe 2/5-3/5 inch in diameter, borne on a bright red club-shaped, fleshy stem terminated by the enlarged calyx in which the drupe sits.

WINTER BUDS: 1/4-3/8 inch long, terminal bud ovate, acute, green, lateral buds divergent.

WOOD: Soft, brittle, coarse-grained, aromatic, dull orange-brown with pale yellow sapwood.

USES: Pulp. Historical uses: fence posts, barrel staves, oil.

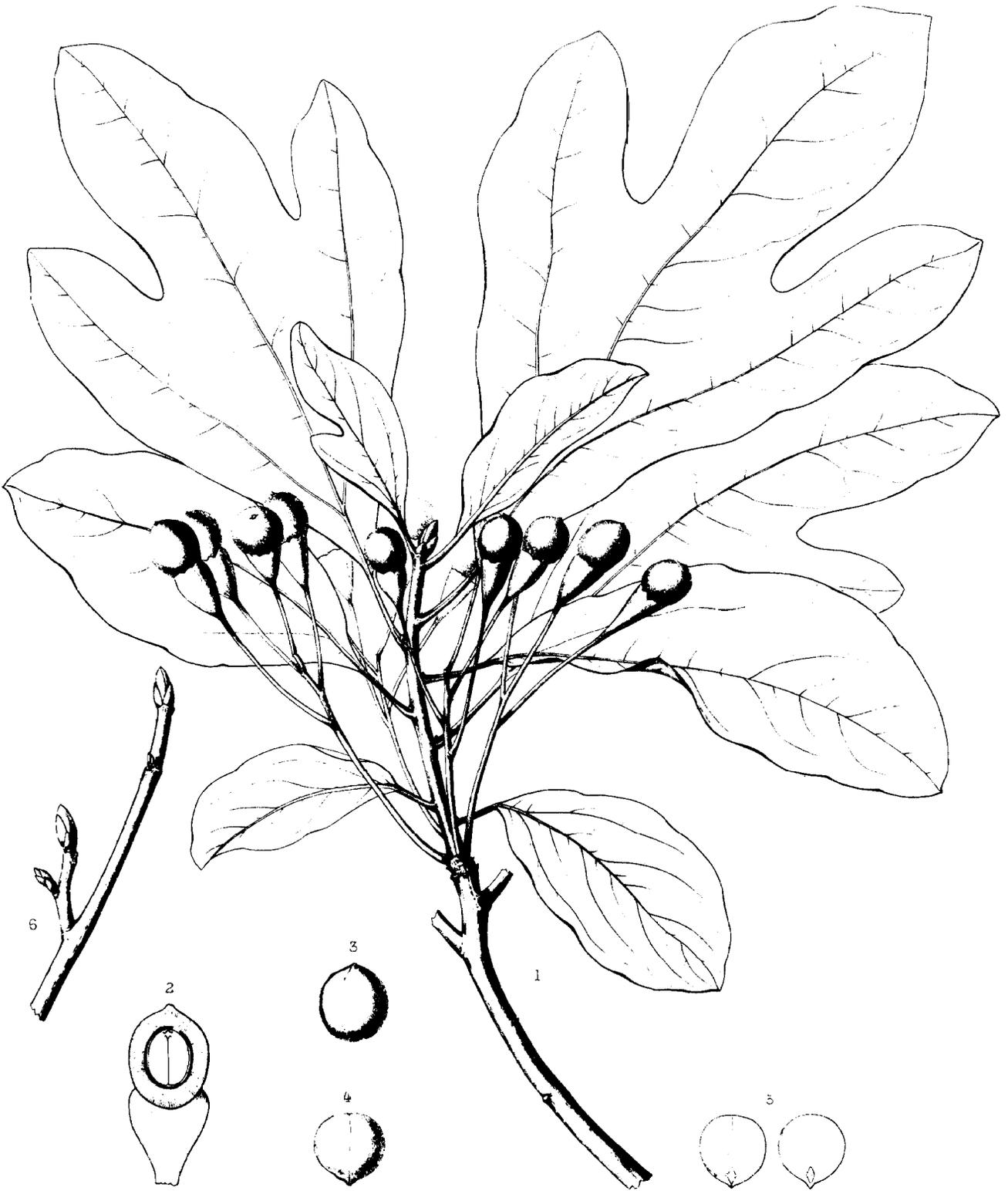
HABITAT: Prefers rich sandy loam, but thrives in a variety of sites.

DISTINGUISHING CHARACTERISTICS: Twigs glossy, aromatic, brittle; leaves entire or may be 2-5 lobed; a single bundle scar in each leaf scar; fruit borne on a club-shaped fleshy stem.

DISTRIBUTION IN ALABAMA: Seems to be widely distributed north of the Black Belt; south of the Black Belt, it seems to have escaped cultivation.

EXPLANATION OF PLATE

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| 1. A fruiting branch | 4. An embryo |
| 2. Vertical section of a fruit | 5. Sections of an embryo |
| 3. A seed | 6. A winter branchlet |



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