



# Newsletter



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Carvers Creek State Park

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## 2022 Year of the Tree: The Sassafras

Have you ever had a nice cold glass of Root Beer on a hot summer's day? Did you know that root beer was first made from the sassafras plant? It was also used for making tea, and before modern antibiotics were common, sassafras roots steeped in water were used to fight infections. However, sassafras is not considered safe to drink or use anymore, and modern teas and sodas combine other flavors to get a similar taste. Besides being the original Root Beer, ground up sassafras was also used in the South as a thickening agent for soups and gumbo. The aromatic wood from the sassafras tree was believed to repel bugs and used to make bed frames and flooring.

### Identifying Sassafras

The first step in finding sassafras is knowing where to look to find it. Sassafras is considered an "early successional" plant, which means that it tends to grow quickly in areas that have been disturbed by things like fires or tree cutting. Sassafras likes direct sun, and plenty of it, and can even die out if its sunlight is taken by other trees or growth. Look for sassafras in areas that have been burned in the past year or two, or near the edges of our maintained trails. Those areas, especially the areas that have been burned in the past few years, have good sunlight and the sandy soil that sassafras does best in.

At Long Valley Farm, if you walk down the Rockefeller Loop trail from the park office for about a quarter mile, you will find an interpretive signboard on your left. The area is open to the sun, and you will also see the distinctive black layer that remains from a prescribed burn under a couple seasons' worth of pine straw and leaf debris. That's a great area to look for sassafras along the trail.

When looking for sassafras, the biggest giveaway is the distinctive leaf patterns. Sassafras is one of the few trees that has more than one shape of leaf on the same tree. Sassafras commonly has three leaf shapes on each plant. One is an mitten-shaped leaf, another is an oval, single pointed leaf, and the third is a three pointed, turkey-track shaped leaf. Once you start to look closely at the leaves, you will quickly get very skilled at identifying sassafras!

In the late summer and fall, sassafras leaves turn yellow, orange and red. At Carvers Creek State Park, some of the sassafras leaves are beginning to turn now.



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Within the community of plants and animals, sassafras acts as a host for the spicebush swallowtail butterfly. The caterpillars feed on the young leaves. The adult butterfly is black with ivory colored spots along the edges of its wings, and is a common sight throughout the park from spring to early fall.



The spicebush swallowtail caterpillar resembles a tiny snake and thereby may gain some protection from predators.

Photo by J. R. Baker



Spicebush Swallowtail Butterfly

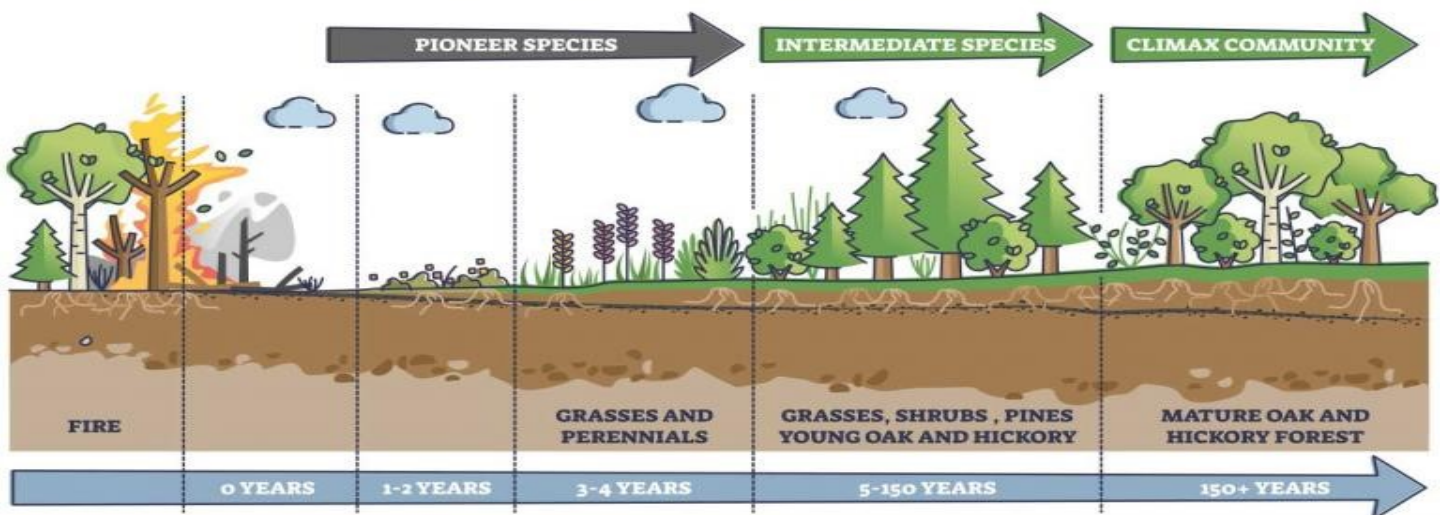
I may look scary but I'm not dangerous. This just helps me turn into a beautiful butterfly!

Sassafras has a role in American history also. During the explorations of Sir Francis Drake in the late 1500's, he returned to England with a ship full of sassafras roots. It quickly became a favorite drink and health tonic, and a few years later became so valuable that expeditions were sent to America just to harvest sassafras roots. In fact, when the rights to the Jamestown settlement were granted by the English crown, they were required to send 30 tons of roots back to England every year!

### Succession in plant communities

Earlier we talked about how sassafras is considered an "early successional" plant. That's because that when a landscape changes due to something like a fire or a lot of destructive insects, it has to begin to regrow. But the plants that thrive in a fully wooded and mature forest may not be able to regrow in an area with a lot of sun and dry ground. That allows plants like the sassafras to take root early and become part of the foundation of the new growth. The early plants help secure loose soil and add needed nutrients back into the ground for later plants. The early growing plants begin to shade the ground, help to retain moisture and make other changes which encourages different types of plants to grow and eventually overtake the sassafras. It's all part of the delicate balance of nature that supports our world.

## SECONDARY SUCCESSION



If you would like to attend one of our upcoming programs please call 910-436-4681 to reserve your spots.

## Community Outreach

The following program are sponsored by Carvers Creek State Park. *They will not be held at the park but rather, in different places within the community.*

**Thursday, Oct. 6th @ 3:30 pm**

**Snake Truths at Spring Lake Library**

### Nocturnal Animals

**Saturday, Oct. 1st @ 7:00pm**

Take an evening stroll with a park ranger and learn more about the nocturnal life in the woods around us. You will get to explore the Long Leaf Pine and wetland communities found here at the park.

**Please call to register.**

### Owl Prowl

**Sunday, Oct. 2nd @ 7:30pm**

Participants will be learning about owl adaptations, what they sound like, as well as looking for our own owls to identify! We ask participants bring their own flashlight.

### Canoe Hike

**Saturday, Oct. 8th @ 5:00pm**

**Saturday, Oct. 22nd @ 6:00pm**

We will be learning the basics of canoeing and then trying out our new skills by maneuvering through the Cypress swamp. This is great for beginners or those wanting a closer look at the Cypress trees. **Call in advance to register. Limited spots Please allow approximately 15 minutes to walk from the parking lot to the Rain Shelter. Age limit is 8 years old and older.**

### Journaling from Scratch

**Sunday, Oct. 9th @ 1:00pm**

Come to the park to learn and practice paper making! The Park Superintendent will lead a class on how to make paper and everyone will have the opportunity to make their own. After we finish, we will use homemade paper to make nature journals and go on an easy nature hike to explore the park and practice journaling. This class is suitable for all ages and families are welcome! Please call the park at (910) 436-4681 to reserve your space. This class is limited to 10 people. Due to the nature of the activity, this class may be rescheduled if there is inclement weather.

### Pumpkin Carvers

**Sunday, Oct. 16th @ 10am**

Come decorate pumpkins with us! We'll have a contest for the Spookiest, Cutest, and Most Creative pumpkins. We will provide small and medium pumpkins and decorating supplies but you're welcome to bring your own! You must sign-up ahead of time. You may call the park office to sign-up.

### Wilderness Walk with William

**Friday, October 14th @ 8:30 AM**

Get some exercise while enjoying fresh air and spend a morning in the park, when you join us for a 1-3 mile walk on park trails. Go at your own pace or stay with the group. All ages and abilities welcome (parents/guardians must accompany children under 15). Meet outside the Welcome Center. Bug spray, water and boots, walking or running shoes recommended. No registration required.

### Campfire Stories

**Friday, Oct. 21st @ 6:30pm**

Feeling spooky? Join us for some exciting stories around the campfire at the secret pond! Enjoy some funny and true stories to get you into the Halloween spirit. You're also welcome to bring a snack to roast over the fire! You must sign up ahead of time. You may call the park office to sign up. Please meet at the secret pond.