

January 2012 *Guess that Plant*



Sassafras albidum, Common Sassafras

Last month's mystery plant continued to work on your skills as a winter bark botanist. The bark photo was a close up of sassafras, another one of New Jersey's common hardwood trees. Telltale identification features on the photo included the deeply incised channeled bark. With the plant in hand there is a distinct sassafras odor that comes from bruised branches and roots. The leaves show an unusual polymorphism, based on the age of the leaf tissue. Young leaves have a three pad mitten shape; an older leaf looks like a snow mitten with two lobes; and mature leaves have no lobes, they look like spicebush leaves. You can find sassafras in uplands throughout the state, specifically in hedgerows and as a forest understory tree.