

Sarsaparilla — *Smilax* spp. and Sassafras — *Sassafras* spp.¹

James M. Stephens²

While they are not considered vegetables according to the usual classification, sarsaparilla and sassafras are mentioned here because of their minor importance as aromatic herbs.

In recent times, considerable health concerns have been raised for the consumption of sassafras tea.

SARSAPARILLA

Sarsaparilla, the "good guy" drink of the early American western movies, is made from the dried roots of several various species of *Smilax*. Three of these are *S. officinalis*, *S. papyracea*, and *S. medica*. It does not come from the sassafras tree as some have been led to believe. *Smilax* plants, which are woody, thorny vines arising from swollen underground tubers, are abundant in Florida woodlands.

SASSAFRAS

Sassafras is a tree of the laurel family, *Sassafras variifolium* and *S. albidum*. The leaves, stem bark, and root bark contain volatile oils and odors. In Florida, sassafras spreads rapidly over abandoned fields by means of suckers from the roots. The bark is sometimes used in water as a tea. Also, the oil is sometimes distilled from the roots.

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 2. James M. Stephens, Professor, Horticultural Sciences Department, Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida, Gainesville FL 32611.

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