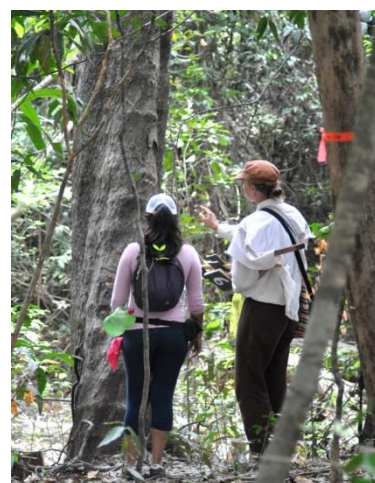


# TREE PROFILE

## Corporación Ambiental La Pedregoza

Common Name: <b>Sassafras</b>	Scientific Name: <b><i>Ocotea cymbarum</i></b>	Family: <b>Lauraceae</b>
Region: <b>From Colombia to Guyana and from Ecuador to Brasil</b>	Size: <b>Up to 25 meters tall and with a trunk diameter of 80 cm</b>	Habitat: <b>Grows in the inundation forest</b>
Leaves: <b>Simple, helicoidal, alternate, oblong, 19 x 5.5 cm</b>	Bark: <b>Externally smooth and fragrant when fresh</b>	Phenology: <b>Flowers in Sept. and Oct., seeds in May and June</b>
Basic Density: <b>On average 0.45</b>	Foliage: <b>Green with a thin texture</b>	Propagation: <b>By seeds (short lasting)</b>

**Uses:** The Sassafras is an endangered multi-use tree that contains high value safrole oil. Related species of the same family have already been driven to extinction in North America, where the oil was used to make root beer in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. It is being used as fuel and lamp oil in other countries, especially Brazil. Traditional medicines use both the oil and the bark in various preparations. The tree has fine and aromatic wood that is excellent for fine furniture, which made it popular in Europe. Besides furniture, the wood has also been used for general construction and for boat building. The seeds are quite large and a popular food source for scarlet macaws, toucans and parrots. These many uses mean that Sassafras has considerable folkloric interest as well.



Seed collectors with a Sassafras tree



Germination trial with Sassafras at La Pedregoza

**Growth:** There are male and female Sassafras trees. Only females have seeds. The seeds are large with high moisture content (36 mm x 18 mm). They have to be germinated immediately after collection or they spoil. Collecting Sassafras seeds is a challenge, as female trees are often hard to find, and because the seeds ripen after the inundations begin, making access difficult. There are approximately 85 seeds in a kilogram. Seed collectors have to compete with birds, who like the seeds as food. The germination rate is often below 50%. *La Pedregoza* has test-planted Sassafras inside existing cultivations, as the tree needs shade. It is too early to know whether the Sassafras will adapt to those conditions or not. It would appear that Sasafrás is of moderate growth, but experiments with fertilizers and biochar might accelerate the growth rate. With shade, these trees could definitely be planted in low lying areas and in savannahs that flood.

**Pressures:** *Ocotea cymbarum* is in the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species at a lower concern level, however this has not been revised in some time. There is ongoing illegal logging of Sassafras, because of its high value, and in many parts of Vichada it has become rare. With the exception of some test cultivations at *La Pedregoza*, there are no known Sassafras plantations in Colombia, and the tree suffers from logging without replanting.



*Semillas de Sasafrás*



*Siembra de Sasafrás en La Pedregoza*

**Recommendations:** This species is an important niche tree in the biodiversity of Orinoco River basin forests. It is urgent that a seed bank for *Ocotea cymbarum* be established, and that alternative cultivations can take the pressure off the species in the wild. Due to its many uses, commercialization of Sassafras makes good economic and ecological sense, and can act as a conservation tool, while the species starts to recover. At *La Pedregoza*, we propose to conduct ongoing studies dedicated to learning how best to cultivate and conserve this tree.



*The La Pedregoza Environmental Corporation is a non-profit NGO dedicated to the conservation of native species in the Orinoco River basin, and the administrator of the La Pedregoza Natural Reserve. We welcome individuals and businesses who would like to assist us in the conservation and protection of native tree species and other Orinoco flora and fauna. For more information please contact us at [trees@pedregoza.org](mailto:trees@pedregoza.org)*

*La Corporación Ambiental La Pedregoza es una ONG sin ánimo de lucro, dedicada a la conservación de especies nativas de la cuenca del Río Orinoco y administradora de la Reserva Natural de la Sociedad Civil La Pedregoza. Se da la bienvenida a personas y empresas que deseen ayudar en la conservación y protección de árboles nativos y otras especies en la Orinoquía. Para más información contacte a [arboles@pedregoza.org](mailto:arboles@pedregoza.org)*