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Summer Foliage of Sassafras (Sassafras albidum)

February 2020

SEEDLINGS

Wild Ones|Kalamazoo Area Chapter

What more substantial service to conservation than to practice it on one's own land?--Aldo Leopold



Cream violet (Viola striata) is native to Michigan's rich deciduous forests. It can be an aggressive groundcover, as it spreads by seed, rather than by rhizomes.

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Climate Action, Citizen Action, and the Future Landscape of Kalamazoo

Wed. February 26, 7pm

Jamie McCarthy, *Development Project Coordinator, City of Kalamazoo*

Christina Anderson, *City Planner, City of Kalamazoo*

Jamie McCarthy, Sustainable Development Coordinator with the City of Kalamazoo, will lead a discussion at the February 26 meeting of Wild Ones on how KAWO members and the City can cooperate on “Climate Action, Citizen Action, and the Future Landscape of Kalamazoo.”



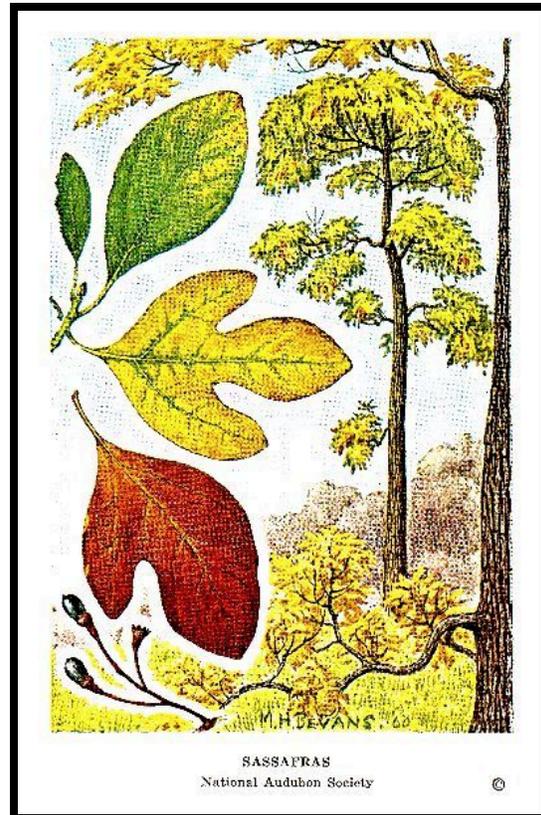
She'll review the goals for protecting and regenerating the City's green environment as outlined in Imagine Kalamazoo 2025, the master plan for future development, which emphasizes using native species in future public and private landscaping. [Read more](#)

Native Michigan Tree: Sassafras

Ilse Gebhard

As a Michigander, there is an easy way to remember the identification of Sassafras (*Sassafras albidum*) by one of its leaf shapes, a mitten. Sassafras is unusual in that it has three distinct leaf shapes (unlobed, 2-lobed and 3-lobed) on the same tree, often on the same branch and even the same twig. (See photo right)

Sassafras is a small to medium size tree with branches that often have a contorted look. Seedlings are shade tolerant but need some sun to survive. Thus it is considered an edge species rather than forest interior. In open areas, where it has no competition, it forms small clones. In addition to cloning, it grows easily from seeds distributed by birds and mammals. Its soft, weak wood has little commercial value. The lore of its culinary and medicinal uses is too extensive to discuss here.



Along the Kal-Haven Trail Sassafras often looks more like a shrub than a tree -just enough sun to survive but not enough to grow big. This size is ideal for finding eggs and larvae of Spicebush Swallowtail butterflies or Promethea moths. Our native trees are host plants to many insects, but the leaves on which they feed are often inaccessible, although not to birds. Birders often get “warbler necks” from looking at birds flitting through the canopy as they feed on insects.

Sassafras is dioecious, which means that some trees have male flowers and others female but not both on the same tree. This makes clones unisexual. The drooping, greenish-yellow flower clusters emerge with the leaves in May. While they are inconspicuous, insects do find and pollinate them.

Sassafras fruit are drupes – think cherries or peaches with flesh around a hard stone inside of which is the actual seed. They are a lustrous dark blue surrounded at the base by the scarlet calyx and hanging from bright red stalks called pedicels. Like spicebush berries, their high fat content make them very desirable for birds migrating south in the fall.

A southern species, Sassafras reaches the northern limit of its range in Michigan's Lower Peninsula. Common in the southern half, it becomes rare northward to Manistee and Grand Traverse counties.

Michigan's biggest Sassafras listed in the [Michigan Big Tree Database](#) is located in Allegan County. It has a girth of 213 inches, is 66 feet tall and has a crown spread of 52 feet.

Plant of the Month: Arrowleaf Violet

Many of us take for granted the abundance of violets in the spring; they are everywhere! Many violet varieties that we see for sale in the local nurseries are from Europe. But we have a native violet that is beautiful and slightly bigger than its European cousins. **Arrow Leaved Violet** (*Viola sagittata*) is a hardy native violet that grows in most soil types.

Arrow Leaved Violet (Viola Sagittata)



Native violets play an important role as the host plants for fritillary butterflies, those orange and black beauties you see in your garden. When violets are mown down, the tiny eggs and larva are destroyed. You can save these lovely pollinators (and the violets!) by adjusting your mower blade to it's highest setting, or by simply mowing around them.

Great Spangled Fritillary



Creepy Crawly Gifts Can Be Wonderful!

Ilse Gebhard

About 20 years ago the word got out - Ilse likes creepy, crawly caterpillars and whatever they turn into. Consequently, I have been on the receiving end of some wonderful gifts of nature from friends who love and want to protect our natural world. Egg, larval and pupal stages of swallowtail butterflies have been among them.

The message from my friend down the street was, “if you want a Spicebush Swallowtail Butterfly caterpillar, come on over. Hubby is in the front yard taking photos of it.” Knowing that my back would enjoy a break from weeding, I jumped into the car.

Sure enough, here he was prostrate on the ground doing what he does so well – taking wonderful pictures of flowers and critters.

The caterpillar was in the process of spinning the two very fine silken strands by which it was attaching itself to a goldenrod stem. This process just precedes the transformation of caterpillar to chrysalis. Merely inches above the ground, the caterpillar apparently thought this a perfect spot to spend its chrysalis stage, but I’m not so sure the photographer agreed on this 90°F, 100% humidity mid-July day.

The Spicebush caterpillar’s host plants are not only its namesake Spicebush, but also Sassafras, of which there were several in the area. The first 3 larval stages called instars resemble bird-droppings, while the last two instars are green with two orange and black spots like pupiled eyes on the thorax and two yellow spots right behind on the abdomen, followed by four lines of small blue spots in the middle of the back. Just before pupating the caterpillar turns yellow or orange.

(Photos below: Spicebush Swallowtail egg on leaf, and early instar, late instar (green), and pre-pupa (yellow)).



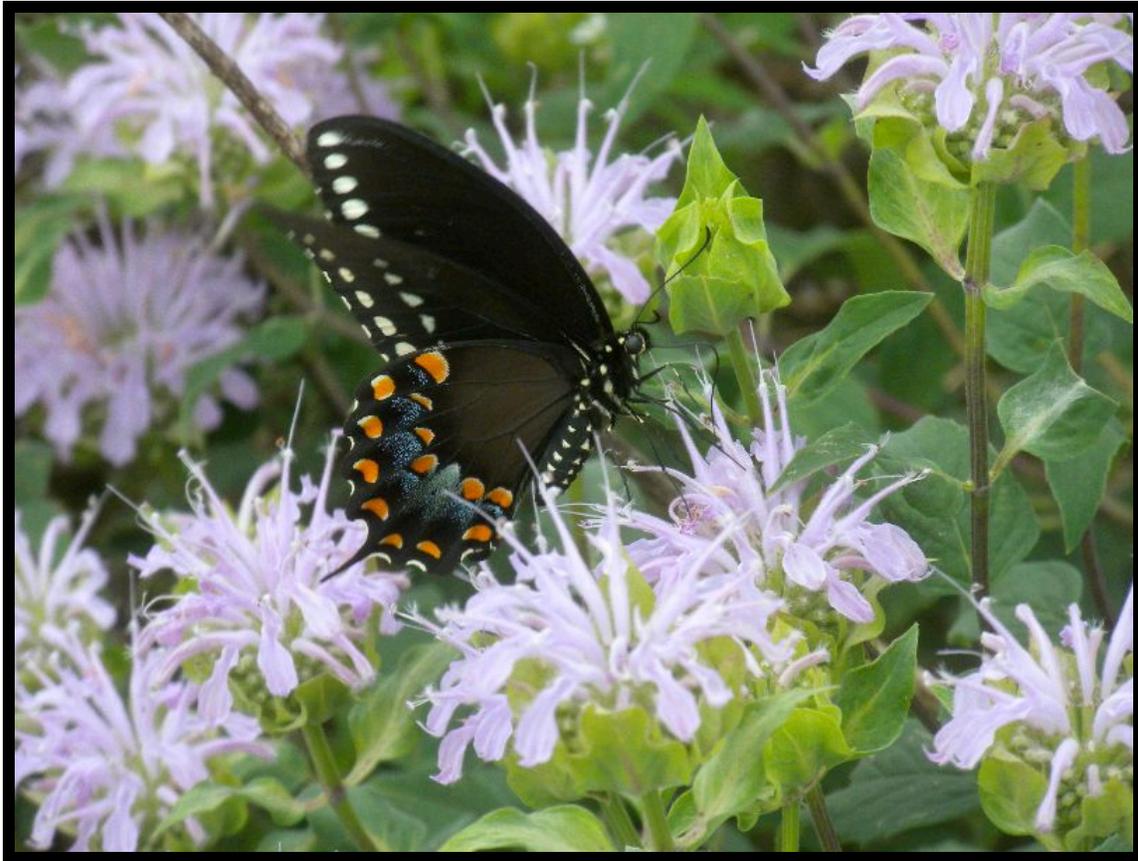
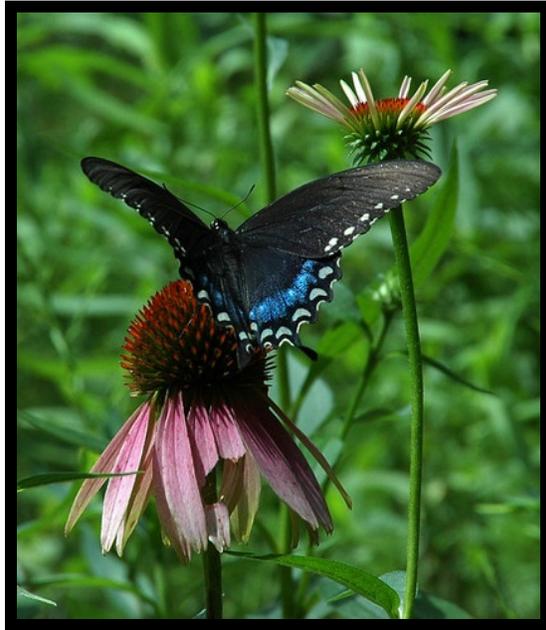


I had hoped to see the chrysalis formation but I have to sleep sometime. Overnight the attached caterpillar had formed its tan and brown mottled chrysalis from which 21 days later emerged the bane of swallowtails, an ichneumon wasp. The caterpillar had been parasitized.

A similar fate had befallen another Spicebush caterpillar given to me by a friend the previous fall. After carefully overwintering it at the chrysalis stage, the same wasp species emerged on May 16. The caterpillar had been parasitized in the fall, hosting the wasp all winter.

Since that time I have successfully raised several "Spicys" as I call them. I learned to look for early instars inside Spicebush and Sassafras leaves that are folded over, where they are hiding from predators and potential parasitic wasps. The smaller they are, the less likely they have been parasitized.

Photos below: Spicebush swallowtail chrysalis, swallowtail on purple coneflower, and swallowtail on wild bergamot.



What's Happening at the National Office

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Community Events of Interest to Wild Ones

February 26 - 7pm - KAWO Monthly indoor program: [Climate Action, Citizen Action, and the Future Landscape of Kalamazoo](#) • Jamie McCarthy, Development Project Coordinator and Christina Anderson, City Planner for Kalamazoo

March 1 - 2 - Wildflower Association of Michigan [Annual Wildflower Conference, Ecosystems in a Changing World](#). Lansing, MI

March 25 - 7pm - KAWO Monthly indoor program: *Language of Trees*, with Dr. Ellen Holste, Program Coordinator, Pierce Cedar Creek Institute

April 3-4 - [Kalamazoo Foodways Symposium](#) - Plant Forward: Savoring Our Past, Eating For The Future. Kalamazoo, MI

April 17-26 - [Run For The Trees](#) - Raise money to plant trees in Michigan State Parks.

Editor's note: If you know of any local events pertaining to native plants that you feel may interest our readers, please send them along to us at the address below. Thanks!

SEEDLINGS is edited by Kim Patrie. It appears mostly monthly. The next regular issue will come early in March. **Deadline for March issue is February 20.**

Send submissions to Kim at safiraraks@gmail.com

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To share comments and suggestions, simply reply to this email.

We look forward to hearing from you!

Find more information and news at www.KalamazooWildOnes.org
and www.Facebook.com/KalamazooAreaWildOnes



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