

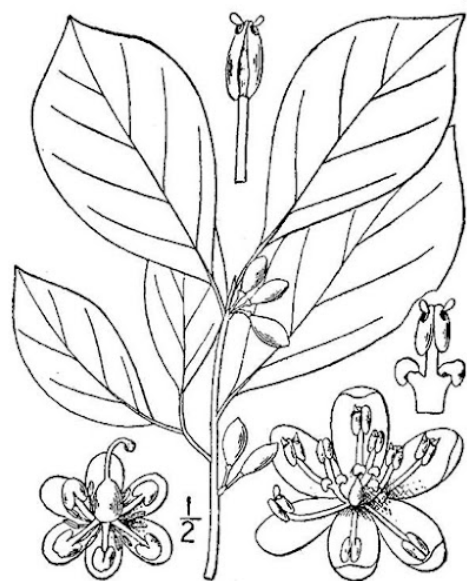


Spicebush: *Lindera benzoin*

Appalachian allspice, Feverbush, Spicewood

Overview and Identification: Spicebush is an understory tree or small shrub that often grows in our Pennsylvania forests in full or part shade. Spicebush in the early spring blooms very early with tiny clusters of yellow flowers. Spicebush is in the Laurel family as other aromatic shrubs such as sassafras, bay, and cinnamon).

Spicebush is a very common native woody shrub that grows in the understory of primarily deciduous trees and is extremely abundant in most of its range. You can find Spicebush under oak-hickory or beech-maple forests. Spicebush is easy to identify due to the smell—crush up a leaf and you will smell a warm, spicy aroma (the only thing similar is Sassafras, and Sassafras has a very different and distinct leaf). The leaves are alternate and are smooth and oblong. Spicebush has varying sizes of leaf on each branch. In early spring, Spicebush blooms before leafing out with tiny yellow aromatic flowers that have a warm lemony scent. After leafing out, the bush develops small clusters of waxy green berries which ripen to a bright red. The leaves turn yellow in the fall. Spicebush grows up to 10' tall and 10' wide and can sometimes grow in thickets. Spicebush enjoys rich and fertile soil.



Harvest: Harvest the branches and leaves throughout the growing season. Harvest branches in winter. Harvest berries when red. (Green berries can be harvested too and have a peppery flavor good for seasoning). You can harvest the ends of the branches as well (leaf + branch), especially if you need to trim back from a path. Spicebush tolerates pruning well and if you prune them back, they will regrow even more abundant.

Herbalism Overview

- **Taste:** Sweet, Aromatic, Spicy, Warming
- **Herbal Actions:** Aromatic, Warming, Carminative, Diaphoretic, Antispasmodic, Expectorant
- **Organ and System Affinities:** Gastrointestinal, Respiratory, Circulatory
- **Addressing tissue states:** Stagnation

Spicebush is an abundant native shrub that is delicious and aromatic. Spicebush is under-used in the herbal community, but you should really get to know this wonderful, native shrub both as a medicinal and culinary herb!

Uses

Spicebush has a long history of being used as medicine by indigenous peoples, and later, folk herbalism in Appalachia as a spring tonic, for digestive support, and to help stimulate and circulate the blood, and for fever support. The leaves, berries, and twigs are all medicinal and the berries can also be dried green or red and crushed to add a unique allspice-like flavor to food. In the spring, you can gather the twigs or budding branches and make a decoction (cover, boil 15 minutes, remove from heat, and let stand). Or you can dry and later make an infusion of leaves (tea, bring water to a boil, add leaves and remove from heat, let stand 5-10 minutes). Drink this often and in quantity.

- **Carminative:** The aromatic plant offers carminative properties for the entire digestive system. Spicebush tea can help treat a slow, sluggish digestion where there is gas, cramping, bloating, food moving slowly, or other congestion. Struggling with cramps and congestion in the gut. Drink anytime including after a big meal! Aromatics have so many qualities for the digestive system. You can also use the tincture here (but the tea is so good, why not!)
- **Cold/Flu/ and Upper Respiratory support:** Spicebush is a wonderful herb for supporting the flu or cold, especially when there is a combination of fever and respiratory congestion. Spicebush helps support a healthy fever response by stimulate outward circulation and relaxing the body's resistance to the fever. It is also good for mucus that is thick and stuck in the head or lungs.
- **Relaxing expectorant, spasmodic cough and upper respiratory congestion.** Spicebush also works well as a respiratory relaxant, when you have a spasmodic cough; it can help relax and clear the lungs. You can combine spicebush with other lung plants (Mullein, New England Aster)
- **Spicebush in Elderberry syrup:** Traditional Elderberry Syrup is made with local elderberries and a range of imported ingredients. Herbalist Jim McDonald shares a different take: Calamus root (replaces ginger), Spicebush berry, and Staghorn sumac berries to create a fully foraged and locally available syrup.

Preparation and Use

Parts Used: Berries (green or red), small branches, leaves. The branches alone in the winter can be brewed up into a tea (boil for 15-20 min) that tastes like chai; all the aerial parts have slightly different tastes that are still all "spicebush."

Preparation: Tea, tincture. Leaves can be dried. You can dry branches. You can dehydrate and dry berries.

Contraindications: None

Bonus: The Edible Nature of Spicebush!

- **Appalachian Spice: Berries:** The green berry (unripe) and red berry (ripe) offer two different culinary experiences. The green berries are very sharp, lemony, and peppery and can be harvested anytime before they go red. The green berries are most intense when they are smaller and less plump. They can be used as a pepper substitute due to their very strong taste. You can crush them or add them to a pepper grinder. They are wonderful on meats, vegetables, and wild game!
- **Tea:** The leaves and branches make a very pleasant and enjoyable drinking tea any time of year that is warming and spicy. Berries would also make a tea- more warming and spicy, but still nice tasting.