



**BEESON'S**  
McHenry County  
Nursery, Inc.

# Nursery News

February 2008 - Research & Development

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## Serviceberry - A Sweet Sign of Spring



This spring, take a walk through the still-sleeping early-spring woods. In the midst of the grays and browns, you may come upon a delicate whisper that spring is here. The Amelanchier are blooming with soft clouds of white flowers.

Amelanchier (or Serviceberry) are hardy, long-lived ornamental trees, many of which are Native to the US. They typically grow in the understory as a small tree, but they are extremely adaptable and can thrive in sunny areas as well. In urban or suburban sites, they are a great specimen plant or they can be grouped together in naturalized areas.

Amelanchier is a taxonomically confusing genus, with very similar species and a tendency to hybridize freely (for example, *A. x grandiflora*, one former name of which was *A. confusa*). Identification can be confusing, and sometimes the only way to tell the difference is in the spring by the flowers and new leaves, or by the different sizes and forms.

Do not let the confusion over names deter you from using Amelanchier in the landscape. There is a species and form for nearly every site, whether a low colonizing multistem form or small tree form. Single stem trees can be difficult to find in the market as Amelanchier tend to be more difficult to keep straight. As with many Native trees, working with the natural growth patterns and form makes for the healthiest trees.

### The Four Seasons of Serviceberry

The leaves of serviceberry are similar in appearance to apple (also members of the Rosacea family). Fall color varies among the species but can range from shades of yellow to orange to purple. The smooth, slightly striated gray bark and interesting branching form is attractive in winter.

Small delicate white flowers in clusters appear fleetingly in April to May, before or with the emerging leaves. Peak flowering lasts a few days up to a week, but planting a combination of species in a grouping can extend the flowering time.

The 'berries' are small berry-like pomes. The red fruits appear in June-July and mature to a ripe purple. The fruits appear covered with a whitish 'bloom', similar to blueberries. Serviceberries are sweet and edible to humans but are quickly gobbled up by hungry birds. For the best fruiting, site the plants in full sun, and as with the flowers, use multiple species.



The edible fruits can be used fresh, cooked, dried, in preserves or in wine. Slightly tart, the fruits are high in vitamin C, potassium, iron, and manganese. Amelanchier are an important species for wildlife, with over 58 species that use the plant for food or shelter, from ground birds (pheasant, grouse) to songbirds to small and large mammals (squirrels, chipmunk, fox, moose, coyote, rabbits, deer, bear). (For more information see Urban Wildlife and Landscaping Not Just For the Birds at [www.beesongrows.com/ArchivePage.html](http://www.beesongrows.com/ArchivePage.html)).

### Siting Your Serviceberry

Amelanchier prefer rich, moist, well-drained, slightly acidic soil, but they are also adaptable to many conditions. They can thrive in full sun or shade, wet or dry sites, and some species even tolerate drought. Serviceberries also tolerate fire or grazing with re-growth from underground rhizomes. Amelanchier are one of the less disease prone genera in the Rosaceae family. Good soil, drainage, and air circulation will prevent any leaf diseases and watering during droughts will reduce stress.

### GO Roots- Glacier Oaks Container Growing to Field Growing at McHenry County Nursery



Grower and propagator, Mary T. McClelland (of our sister company Glacier Oaks Nursery), propagates the majority of our Amelanchier by softwood cuttings. Because of the tendency to hybridize, propagating Amelanchier by seed can result in quite a variation. The strongest cuttings are developed into liners, which are grown in pots for several years as we strive for a vigorous top and a well-branched root system.

Small container plants are then shifted up to larger containers depending on the species, and maintained in our GO Trees Container Tree system. Many of the container grown Amelanchier are sold as 5-7 Gallon plants and successfully established in landscapes. Others are lined out and spaced in the forest soils of our growing fields to develop a heavy specimen clump.

### A Serviceberry by any other name...

To add to the confusion of names, Amelanchier are also known by many different common names. By any name, Amelanchier are sweet ornamentals in the landscape.

- **Shadbush**- For the appearance of the flowers in spring when shad (fish) spawn
- **Serviceberry**- Many different stories- From pioneers heading west, flowers marked the time when the ground was thawed enough to dig graves and have funeral services, or the blooms marked the time when traveling preachers came to town. Could also be a variation of Sarvis from the genus Sorbus, which has similar looking fruit.
- **Saskatoon**- A version of the Cree Indian name for the fruit. Native Americans cultivated Amelanchier and used the fruit in pemmican
- **Juneberry**- One of the more obvious common names
- **Amelanchier**- The French name for a European species





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**Saskatoon Serviceberry** (*Amelanchier alnifolia*) is a western species that is good for harsh sites with alkaline soil. The cultivar 'Regent' is a shrubby form for cold wet sites of the Midwest also with sweeter fruit.



**Downy Serviceberry** (*Amelanchier arborea*) is found as a large multistem shrub form in open dry woodlands. The fuzzy emerging leaves are similar in appearance to Shadblow but the flowers are larger and inflorescences more open.



**Alleghany Serviceberry** (*Amelanchier laevis*) is similar to *A. arborea* in size and form and found in woodlands. The emerging leaves are not fuzzy and bronze to red/purple in color. The fruit is small but sweet.

### Shadblow Serviceberry

(*Amelanchier canadensis*) is a large suckering multistem type, found in tall dense thickets in low wet areas. They prefer moist to wet, acidic soils but unlike many other acid loving plants, do not develop chlorosis in higher pH. The flowers are small with compact inflorescences that appear later than the other species.



### Apple Serviceberry

(*Amelanchier x grandiflora*) is a naturally occurring cross between *A. arborea* and *laevis*. This hybrid flowers earlier with a greater number of larger flowers than *A. laevis*. The fruits are also larger and sweeter, and the new leaves have more of a purple tint.



Amelanchier	Flower Clusters		Form		New Leaves	
	Slightly Drooping	Erect	Tree- 1-5 trunks	Multistem- many trunks	Fuzzy	Bronze-purple
grandiflora	√		√		√	√
arborea	√		√		√	
alnifolia		√		√		
laevis	√		√			√
canadensis		√		√	√	

### References:

Native Trees for North American Landscapes  
by Guy Sternberg  
Manual of Woody Landscape Plants  
by Michael A. Dirr

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