

# RESEARCH UPDATE

## Amelanchier, a native for all seasons

by Douglas Chapman, Dow Gardens Center

Amelanchier, a member of the Rosaceae family, is a unique genus with two spectacular species and an exciting hybrid.

Amelanchier fits as a shrub, small tree, specimen or in natural plantings in parks, commercial or home landscapes.

Amelanchier is native from New England to Georgia and west to Iowa. It grows along streams or rivers in rich, fertile soils.

Although it can grow in many soil types, the soil must be well drained. It must be grown in areas of high humidity. Amelanchier flourishes in sun or shade. It is low maintenance, rarely requiring pruning; needs little or no fertilizer; is infested by few scale insects; and the only important diseases are fire-blight and rust.

Shadblow or serviceberry (*Amelanchier arborea*) is the smallest native in cultivation. It is a round multi-stem shrub, reaching 15 to 20 feet, or up to 30 feet in a few native situations. Its silver-grey bark has subtle black stripes which are quite effective during the winter.

The leaves, as they emerge during late April, are covered with silvery tomentose which yields to a bright green leaf of summer. The fall color varies from yellow to a spectacular scarlet. The foliage is particularly vivid in the fall. The flowers are a pure white at full bloom as the leaves unfold middle to late April.

In fact, they are one of the first

native plants to bloom at about the time of rhododendron "PJM." Shadblow is native from New England to Georgia.

With such a large native range, individual provenances should be selected for each region of the country, like the Great Lakes.

Amelanchier is particularly tolerant of salt spray. Allegheny serviceberry (*A. laevis*) is a medium-sized tree, reaching 40 feet in height—the largest Amelanchier. Its habit is a very upright oval.

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*Amelanchier laevis* is frequently found native, growing as a single-stemmed tree with light silver-gray bark. The white flowers are very showy during late April.

The new leaves are reddish at the time of elongation, becoming a brilliant lime-green during summer.

Like shadblow, it is tolerant of flood conditions yet prefers well-drained, fertile soil. Apple serviceberry (*A. X grandiflora*) is a plant with morphological characteristics between its native parents. Apple ser-

viceberry is a hybrid of *A. arborea* and *A. laevis*. The new leaves that unfold are purplish in color and yield to a dark green summer foliage. The fall foliar color ranges from a brilliant red to deep purple.

The white flowers which are in full bloom during late April are larger than either one of the parents. It has been reported that the flowers are held erect, but I can't say this is reliable as a key identifying characteristic.

The flower bud, just prior to opening, is pink—a good identifying characteristic. The flower at full bloom in late April is a pure white.

In general, amelanchier species are confused in the trade. Many plants available for sale are, in fact, *A. X grandiflora*.

The only time to definitely identify species is as the flower buds expand and the leaves unfold. Apple serviceberry is slightly larger than *A. arborea*. *A. X grandiflora* has a multi-stemmed habit with more spectacular flowers. All three individual types require little or no pruning, grow in sun or partial shade, and have fruit that starts out green in the early summer and changes to red and, finally, a blueberry-colored blue-black.

When looking for a native plant that will fit many landscapes as a specimen or mass border plant, in full sun or partial shade, in rich fertile soil, then either one of the three Amelanchier is a good choice.

Amelanchier is an outstanding four-season plant. **LM**

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