



# CULTIVATION NOTES

## #13

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### Shadbush

*Amelanchier canadensis* (L.) Medikus  
A Rhode Island Native Plant

Family ROSACEAE  
by Roberta Johnson

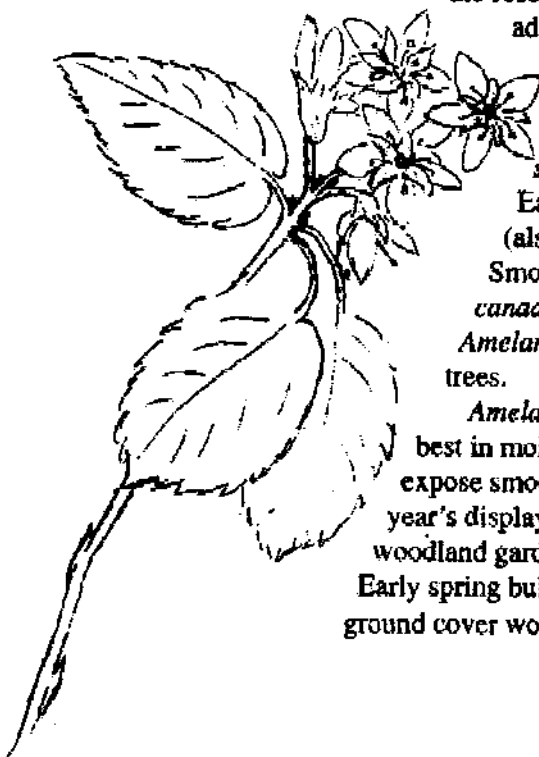
One of a Rhode Island nature lover's joys of ushering in spring is the sight of our native Shadbush. Also known as Shadblow, Serviceberry, or Juneberry, *Amelanchier*, with its masses of small, billowing white blooms, is lovely to behold. This often multi-stemmed 10-15 foot shrub is one of the first to flower in the spring. It was named Shadbush by the early settlers because it flowered at the time when the shad were swimming up the rivers to spawn, usually around late April. The origin of its name "Serviceberry" is grimmer: the early colonists in New England knew that when the Serviceberry bloomed in the early spring, the ground had finally thawed enough to allow burial services for those who had died during the winter to take place.

The racemes contain numerous small white flowers, which have five narrow petals and are about an inch in diameter. In warm weather these flowers may fade quickly and last only three days. This shrub or small tree is also known as the Downy Serviceberry, for as the young leaves emerge among the blossoms they are covered with fine hairs, which give them a silvery appearance.

Thirty days after the flowers have appeared, the leaves are two-inch ovals, and edible, sweet but insipid fruits of reddish purple have developed. We seldom notice the fruits as the birds and small mammals quickly devour them (making this a good wildlife plant for your landscape), but if vigilant you can pick them when ripe and use these "Juneberries" to make delicious pies. Native Americans also used Juneberries in their survival food, pemmican.

In the northern range of this plant it has few pests or diseases, but farther south, as with other members of the rose family, it can be plagued by spidermites, scale, or fireblight. It is advisable not to plant Shadbush in large quantities as it is susceptible to pests in some areas. Locally grown plants will probably perform best. In Rhode Island there are four native Shadbushes: *Amelanchier spicata* (formerly *Amelanchier stolonifera*), or Dwarf Serviceberry; *Amelanchier canadensis*, or Eastern Serviceberry; *Amelanchier arborea*, or Tree Shadbush (also called Downy Serviceberry); and *Amelanchier laevis* or Smooth Serviceberry. Both *Amelanchier spicata* and *Amelanchier canadensis* tend to form colonies, while *Amelanchier arborea* and *Amelanchier laevis* are usually found as single tall shrubs or slender trees.

*Amelanchier canadensis* is one of the hardiest of the genus and grows best in moist situations. In autumn its yellow or bright red leaves fall to expose smooth gray branches with pointed red buds awaiting the following year's display. *Amelanchier canadensis* makes an attractive addition to the woodland garden amidst the early azaleas with evergreens as a background. Early spring bulbs of *Muscaria armeniacum* with *Epimedium rubrum* as a ground cover would make a pleasing and patriotic combination.



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*Amelanchier canadensis* (L.) Medikus Shadbush

Shrub or small tree, usually in clumps; height 10 to 15 feet. White flowers April and May. Prefers swamps, moist woods, and damp edges.

**Propagation from cuttings:** Soft wood cuttings prove successful as does grafting onto common rootstocks.

**Propagation from divisions:** In the fall after the leaves have fallen, some species can be lifted and divided into sections.

**Propagation from seed:** Collect the fruit when ripe and remove the seeds (5-10 sickle-shaped seeds are contained within each berry), and do not allow the seeds to dry out. Stratify the seeds for four months at 40° F within a planting medium, then allow germination to proceed.

**Sources of plants:** If a local nursery does not carry Shadbush, it may be able to order for you from a wholesaler. Mail order houses such as Mellingers of Ohio, Wayside Gardens in South Carolina, or Farmer Seed and Nursery, Faribault, Minnesota all carry young plants of *Amelanchier* cultivars.

### Cultivars currently offered by American nurserymen include:

*Amelanchier alnifolia*: a native to the Great Plains. A denser, more compact form named "Regent" is available.

*Amelanchier asiatica*: a shad native to Korea and Japan; may reach 40 ft. in height. Winter buds a deep red.

*Amelanchier canadensis*: earliest to bloom and most attractive; sometimes called *A. oblongifolia*.

*Amelanchier grandiflora*: a hybrid form.

*Amelanchier laevis*: 30 to 50 ft. tree; this and *A. canadensis* are widely used in European parks.

*Amelanchier ovalis*: 6 to 9 ft. shrub, a European native.

**RIWPS Policy:** Never dig plants in the wild without written permission of the landowner. Take seeds sparingly.

### My own notes:

### References:

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Illustrations by Roberta Johnson.

