

NATURE AT RISK

A Fishy Name for a Fruitful Tree

From Brodhead Watershed Association

Shadbush is one common name for *Amelanchier canadensis*, that graceful small tree you see blooming in April and May along the roadside. Its delicate, five-petaled flowers open as the shad fish leave the sea and swim up freshwater rivers to spawn, hence the name. It has many others.

But whether you call it shadbush, serviceberry, Juneberry, bilberry, shad-blow, chuckle-berry or currant tree, this harbinger of warm sunny days is a sight to gladden the heart. The flowers open all at once, and since it blooms so early, it's a vital source of nectar for pollinators like butterflies and bees when nothing much else is flowering. This kind of blooming is called "synchronous," meaning "happening at the same time."

The fruit, on the other hand, ripens asynchronously, over a few months; so from June into August, berries that are green, red, and dark purple may all be found on the same tree. That makes for a long-lasting smorgasbord for cedar waxwings, cardinals, bluebirds, many other birds, and fruit-eating mammals.

Including humans! Today people make pies, pastries, and jelly from the fruit. Native Americans used the berries in pemmican. (Though they're not actually berries. Shadbush is a member of the same family as apples and pears. So the "berries" are really "pomes," with a core surrounded by multiple seeds.) The wood is heavy and hard, and has been used for small turned objects, arrow shafts and fishing rods.

Shadbush is not considered threatened or endangered. Yet habitat loss can be locally severe enough to make them hard to find. They're happiest at the edges of the forest, when they get at least four hours sunlight in moist, well-drained humusy soil. But they're adaptable and thrive in full sun to part shade.

In the garden, shadbush tends to form a multi-stemmed shrub up to about 20 feet tall, and supports more than 100 species of butterflies and moths, such as the beautiful green Luna moth and red-spotted admiral butterflies. In fall, the brilliant red-purple leaves are striking.

People who study these things say that the more common names a plant has, the more important it is to the culture of an area. For more information about adding this important shrub to your garden go to <https://extension.psu.edu/serviceberry-in-the-garden-and-in-the-kitchen>

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Like the apple to which it is related, white serviceberry flowers have five petals.

