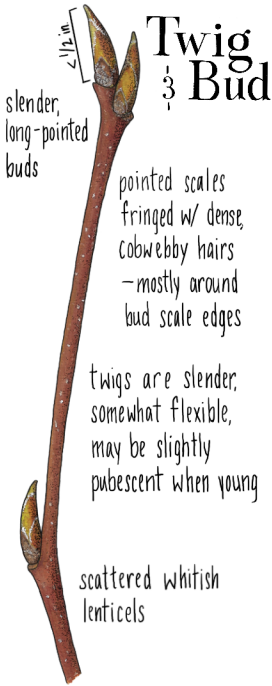


Downy Serviceberry

Amelanchier arborea



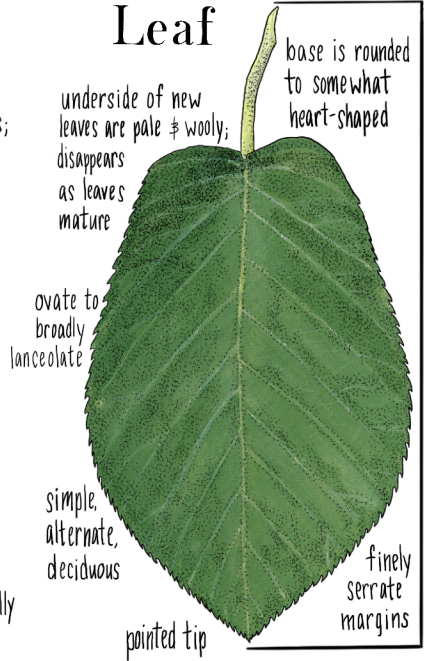
Habitat

prefers well-drained soils; can be found in forests, woodlands, ridges, field edges & roadsides

Bark

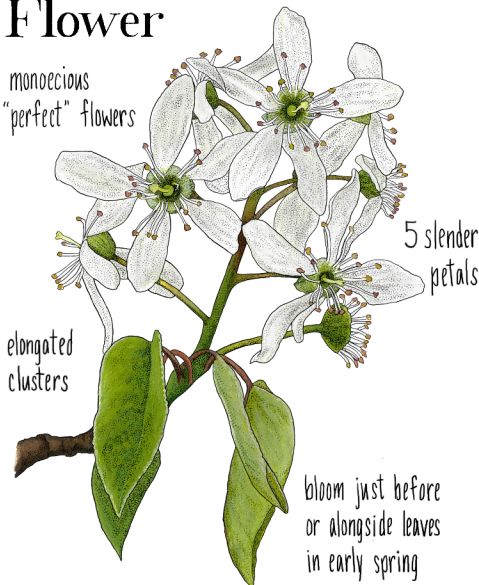
young bark is smooth & light gray w/ darker vertical stripes; becomes rougher w/ age, developing long, blackened vertical cracks; older bark is especially rough & blackened near the trunk base

Leaf



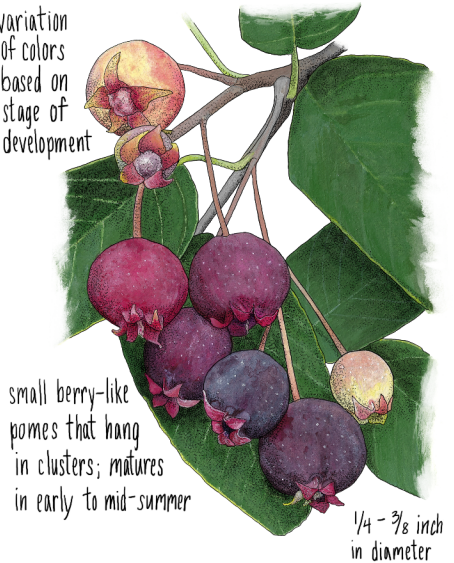
Flower

monoecious "perfect" flowers



Fruit

variation of colors based on stage of development





TREE OF THE MONTH

Downy Serviceberry • *Amelanchier arborea*

ALSO KNOWN AS: COMMON SERVICEBERRY, SHADBUSH, JUNE BERRY, SARVIS

Downy serviceberry (*Amelanchier arborea*) is a short-lived, deciduous tall shrub or small tree belonging to the Rosaceae, or rose, family. Typically growing to heights of 15 to 30 feet, it can occasionally reach 40 feet, though heights up to 60 feet are rare. This plant generally features a narrow crown with multiple woody stems growing from the base, rather than a single leading trunk. Its branches, twigs, and leaves grow in an alternate pattern.

Downy serviceberry typically thrives in well-drained soils across the eastern U.S., much of the Midwest, and southeastern Canada. It can be found in a range of habitats, such as forests, woodlands, ridges, field edges, and roadsides. North of Virginia, it grows along the coast, while south of Virginia, it is found only inland.

Downy serviceberry has **simple** leaves with finely serrated edges, and the shape ranges from oval to broadly **lanceolate**. They have a short, pointed tip and a rounded to slightly heart-shaped base where the leaf blade connects to the **petiole**. When young, the underside of the leaf is covered in soft, woolly hairs, which fade as the leaf matures; this is where "downy" comes from in the common name.

Downy serviceberry's bark begins smooth and light gray with darker vertical stripes. As it ages, it becomes rougher, developing long, blackened cracks and grooves. In older trees, the smoother bark between the cracks becomes rougher and more blackened, particularly near the base of the trunk.

Distinguishing between *Amelanchier* species can be challenging in winter, but as a group, they can be identified by their slender, long-pointed buds, which resemble those of the American beech (*Fagus grandifolia*). These buds have pointed scales that are fringed with dense cobwebby hairs, mostly around bud scale edges, setting them apart from the buds of American beech, which are hairless and display more bud scales. Downy serviceberry twigs are slender and somewhat flexible. When young, twigs are greenish-brown and may have sparse hairs but eventually become completely hairless and turn a reddish-brown to gray with whitish **lenticels**.

Downy serviceberry produces striking flowers that grow in slightly elongated clusters. Each flower features five delicate white petals and contains both male and female reproductive parts. These showy clusters of flowers bloom just before or alongside the leaves in early spring, coinciding with the migration of shad, an anadromous fish species, as they ascend the rivers of New England to spawn. This gives the plant its other common name, shadbush.

Serviceberries produce clusters of small, berry-like pome fruit that mature to a deep reddish-purple or a purple-black color in early to mid-summer. Pomes are fleshy fruit that consists of a central "core" that contains multiple small seeds. Apples and pears are pomes. Serviceberry fruit supports many wildlife species, including over 40 bird species, skunks, red foxes, raccoons, black bears, squirrels, chipmunks, mice, voles, and elk.

The best way to distinguish *Amelanchier* species is by examining flowers or young spring foliage, with downy serviceberry having green emerging leaves. However, minimal differences between species and **hybridization** make field identification difficult for non-experts.

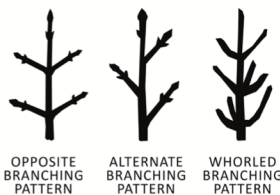
simple (of a leaf): a leaf blade that is one piece, although it may be deeply lobed, divided, or dissected

lanceolate: shaped like the head of a lance; of a narrow oval shape tapering to a point at each end

petiole: the stalk of a leaf that joins it to the twig

lenticels: raised pores in the stem of a woody plant that allow gas exchange; appear as tiny dots on twigs

hybridization: the process of an animal or plant breeding with an individual of another species or variety



The genus name *Amelanchier* is believed to come from the New Latin word of French origins, *amelancier*. Downy serviceberry's species epithet, *arborea*, comes from the Latin word *arboreus*, meaning "tree-like."

The name "serviceberry" is often said to come from the idea that the tree's spring flowers signaled that the ground had thawed enough for burial services to take place. However, in reality, the name is a loanword borrowed from another language due to the similarity between the fruit of *Amelanchier* and another genus. The name initially applied to a group of trees in the genus *Sorbus*, which comes from the ancient Latin word for the fruit of the service tree. Many of the species in this genus have red berries, similar to those of *Amelanchier* species, that were historically used to flavor a beer-like beverage called "service," likely stemming from the Latin word *cerevisia*, which means "beer."



Tree of the Month is sponsored by Berkshire Environmental Action Team, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization located in Pittsfield, MA. Find more Trees of the Month at www.thebeatnews.org.