

On the Wild Side – June, 2011
By Donna Thomas, Oasis Garden Club of IWV

Amelanchier alnifolia –Western Serviceberry, Shadbush, Juneberry



Serviceberry is an erect deciduous shrub which grows from twelve to sixteen feet tall. There are four species native to California. These plants grow on dry rocky slopes at the 4,000 foot elevation. *Amelanchier alnifolia* is a fairly common species in the Sierra Nevada and is found from Kern County and farther north. This plant is a member of the Rose Family (Rosaceae). *Alnifolia* means “alder-like leaves.” The shrub has oval, veined leaves that are one to two inches long with toothed edges. The foliage is deep green in summer and turns to an orange or red color in the fall. The plant has smooth gray bark streaked with red. Serviceberry blooms from May to July with one inch flowers that grow in clusters or racemes at the tips of branches. The bright white flowers are showy against the dark green leaves. Each flower has five petals surrounding a central point containing many reproductive flower parts. Some of the petals are twisted giving the flowers somewhat of a ragged appearance. Dry edible fruits that resemble small apples form after flowering. The fruits are deep blue or purplish in color and are attractive to birds. The fruits are edible and can be used for jams and jellies or as a substitute for blueberries. Native Americans used the dried berries to make pemmican.

Serviceberry is easy to grow and is moderately drought tolerant. It requires some watering in dry conditions. It prefers rocky well drained soil and is adaptable to sun or light shade. Serviceberry is propagated by sowing ripe seeds or by planting stolons or rhizomelike suckers that appear in the spring. The suckers can be potted until a good root system is established and then transplanted in the landscape. This shrub requires little pruning, but may be pruned after bloom to remove crossing or crowded branches.

Since Serviceberry is attractive in all four seasons, it is a good choice for ornamental use in landscapes. It has profuse blooms in spring, bears colorful fruits in summer, and its foliage turns a brilliant color in the fall. It has a graceful airy form in the winter. It can be used as a hedge, at the back of a border planting, or as a” stand alone” specimen plant in the garden. Watch for plants at the Oasis annual Fall Plant Sale at the Desert Empire fairgrounds. Plants may be available from specialized native plant nurseries.

Facts for this article were obtained from the following sources:

[California Native Plants for the Garden](#) – Carol Bornstein, David Fross, and Bart O’Brien

[Growing California Native Plants](#) – Marjorie G. Schmidt

[Native Shrubs of the Sierra Nevada](#) – John Hunter Thomas and Dennis R. Parnell

[Native Shrubs of Southern California](#) – Peter H. Raven

[Sunset Western Garden Book](#)

[Taylor’s Guide to Shrubs](#)

[Taylor’s Guide to Water-Saving Gardening](#)

[Wildflowers of the Eastern Sierra and Adjoining Mojave Desert and Great Basin](#) – Laird R.

Blackwell