

May 2015 Plant of the Month



Amelanchier canadensis (L.) Medic, Shadbush

The May *Plant of the Month* is one of New Jersey's first-to-flower arboreal trees, *Amelanchier canadensis*, the shadbush. The shrub is so-named to coincide its flowering with the running of the American shad in our tidal rivers each spring. Each spring this delicate shrub or small tree is visible for a brief time during late April and early May. Once the flowers are fertile and the petals cast to the wind, the shrub melts back into the understory as a non-descript, weakly branched small tree. Unlike many of other *Amelanchier*'s, shadbush is colonial and not stoloniferous.

The *Amelanchier*'s are notoriously difficult to pin down to species. They exhibit a range of ovary hairiness and petal shape and sizes that just does not seem to fit conventional keys. One key feature that helps identify this species from other similar species is the folded tomentose leaves not fully expanded at anthesis. This helps distinguish shadbush from *Amerlanchier ovalis* and *A. stonlonifera*. Both form colonies by creeping stolons and have leaves more fully formed at flowering time.

As the weather slowly warms, there will be a flush of flowering first beginning in the southern counties and finishing in Sussex County. This happens as the common statewide tree shows itself for a few brief weeks when the forest sorely needs color and spring life.

JRA, 5/2015