

Amelanchier

4 April 2014, by Miranda Kimberley

These plants can fit in small gardens to provide many seasons of interest, Miranda Kimberley finds.



Amelanchier - Image: Floramedia

Amelanchier could possibly be considered a Holy Grail plant - it is a small tree that fulfils the oft-asked-for request of a tree that can be planted in a small, town garden and it provides several seasons of interest, from its masses of white star-shaped flowers in spring to its colourful leaves and ornamental and edible fruits.

There are around 10 species of amelanchier, also known as juneberry, serviceberry or snowy mespilus - all lovely, evocative-sounding common names that refer to their edible fruits borne in June and the snowy effect their haze of white spring flowers.

They are all hardy small trees and shrubs, mainly found in North America but with a few in Europe and Asia. The flowers are classic Rosaceae in form - five-petaled stars of either white or pink. They usually appear on bare branches just before the first leaves, which then unfurl in attractive bronze shades, later becoming richly coloured in the autumn.

The best-known species in the UK are *A. canadensis* and *A. lamarckii* Award of Garden

Merit (AGM), which are often confused. The two species are similar in appearance, with distinguishing features being that *A. canadensis* should have the more erect habit, while *lamarckii* has a more spreading habit and potential to become a small tree, not just a large shrub. Both produce a good display of white flowers. The racemes of *canadensis* are a little more erect to *lamarckii*'s more pendent ones.

A. x grandiflora is a popular hybrid of *A. arborea* and *A. leavis* that has produced one of the best cultivars, the pinky-white flowered 'Robin Hill' AGM. Varieties that display the best juvenile foliage include the aforementioned 'Robin Hill' and 'Ballerina', both with young bronze leaves, 'La Paloma' AGM with its reddish-bronze new foliage and *A. ovalis* 'Edelweiss' with its lovely pinkish new growth.

Amelanchiers are best planted in moist, slightly acidic soil in full sun, which brings out the best autumn colour. Only a few of the species (including *A. alnifolia* and *A. asiatica*) are lime-tolerant. But most will cope with light shade and more neutral soil if necessary.

They are ideal for small and low-maintenance gardens because few problems affect them once they are established. They are available in single and multi-stemmed form. Some species do sucker and these can be stooled or a selection of the stems removed after flowering. The lower branches of shrubs can also be removed, cleaning the lower part of the stem to allow for underplanting, which can be very attractive.

Shade-loving, low-growing perennials or ground cover will do well. Tulips, especially those in pink or purple shades, also look effective up against a backdrop of amelanchier in spring, when the white flowers stand out on dark branches.

What the specialists say

Kate James, marketing manager, Ornamental Trees/Hedges Direct, Lancashire

"Amelanchier is an underrated tree. The combination of autumn colour, flowers and fruits makes this small tree a fantastic all-rounder, suited to planting for aesthetic purposes and to please wildlife. All varieties are tough and able to withstand a north-facing, exposed aspect.

"*A. x grandiflora* 'Robin Hill' is one of the varieties that stands out, for its pink flowers that softly fade to white, and the common *lamarckii* or *canadensis*, which are bushy, wilder-looking species.

"A growing tip is to mix in some ericaceous compost for the best autumn colour. Powdery mildew can sometimes pose problems with amelanchiers. To deal with this without applying chemicals, be sure to remove and burn all the fallen leaves in the autumn. If you

are happy to spray the leaves then do so on a still day and if it's sunny, ideally at dusk, to avoid the foliage becoming scorched."

Stephanie Dunn James, assistant managing director, Trees for Life/FP Matthews, Worcestershire

"Amelanchier (juneberry, snowberry or snowy mespilus) are excellent, very hardy small trees or shrubs for spring flowers and often good autumn colour. In the UK, we are mostly familiar with the ornamental flowering species. However, one variant, *A. alnifolia* - or the 'Saskatoon' - is a large-fruited variety of the shrub grown mainly in Canada as a superfood berry. Watch this space for introductions of the Saskatoon into the UK.

"*A. canadensis* 'Rainbow Pillar' is a relatively new introduction from the USA. It has a neat, compact, upright form with good autumn colour. Good varieties for the smaller garden include *A. alnifolia* 'Obelisk', an interesting fastigiate form with a dense branch structure and an intense display of single white flowers in spring, and *lamarckii*, a small tree or shrub with beautiful orange-red autumn colours and small white flowers in spring.

"They will thrive in moist, well-drained, lime-free soil and they are good in areas that have soil a little on the acid side."

In practice

Elisabetta Clementel, municipal sales executive (North Thames), Coblands, Kent

"Amelanchier is a completely outstanding tree. For small, town gardens it is an ideal choice with several seasons of interest - an early blooming period, three stages of leaf colour, ornamental and edible fruits, and it's even resistant to pollution.

"The most widely grown variety is *A. lamarckii*. It produces a profusion of classic Rosaceae white flowers in spring that can cover the bark completely and create a wonderful contrast against the first leaves, which have a bronze, coppery, almost burnt colour. Then its leaves turn to flame shades in the autumn and fall, creating a carpet of 'fire' against the green of the lawn.

"Some of the amelanchiers produce a lot of suckers from the base. Avoid yourself a time-consuming job and let it grow as a multi-stemmed tree. As the branches gradually loosen, and with a little light pruning, the tree will provide an amazing, elegant silhouette.

"It will look striking when underplanted with low-growing perennials such as *Dicentra spectabilis* 'Alba', *Epimedium* x *versicolour* 'Suphureum', *Sarcococca ruscifolia* var. *chinensis* or *Tiarella cordifolia* 'Spring Symphony'.

"Garden designers often choose amelanchier in their projects. Multi-stemmed specimens were used by Wynniatt-Husey Clarke at the RHS Chelsea Flower Show in 2008, with *digitalis*, *Luzula nivea*, *Anthriscus* and *Lunaria*. Luciano Giubillei, in a unique, elegant and classy formal style, used it with a restricted planting scheme limited to *Carpinus betulus* and *Buxus sempervirens* to create a line of elegant dark forms."

Species and varieties

A. alnifolia, also known by the Native American name "Saskatoon", is a deciduous shrub or small tree. It has oval to circular leaves and short racemes of white flowers that appear in spring when the leaves are still emerging. It has a suckering habit. Height: around 4m. Spread: 3m.

A. alnifolia 'Obelisk' PBR is a highly attractive form of this species, with masses of delicate white flowers in mid spring and mid-green leaves that turn to shades of yellow in the autumn. It becomes a large, columnar shrub that can be pruned into shape after flowering. Recommended for a partially shady position at the front of a border or in a patio container. Height :4-8m. Spread: 2-3m.

A. canadensis is a suckering shrub with tall, erect stems. It is covered in white blossom in early spring, bears purple fruits later in the season and the dark-green leaves turn shades of gold in early autumn. Often used by local authorities for large plantings. Height: 6m. Spread: 3m.

A. canadensis 'Rainbow Pillar' = 'Glenn Form' is a small, hardy, deciduous tree that has a neat and slender habit. Masses of white flowers are produced in April followed by purple fruit in June. The foliage turns from green to brilliant red and orange in autumn. Ideal for a small garden. Height: 4-8m. Spread: 1.5m.

A. x grandiflora 'Ballerina' is a broad-crowned deciduous shrub or small tree that produces masses of white flowers in mid spring before the leaves unfurl a highly attractive bronze colour. The leaves are a feature in autumn too, when they turn reddish-purple before falling. A lovely specimen for a small garden. Height: 5-10m.

A. x grandiflora 'Robin Hill' AGM (H6) is another attractive small tree that suits small gardens. It has pink buds that open into pretty pale-pink flowers in the spring and a more upright habit than 'Ballerina'. These flowers then fade to white before falling and berries are produced on mature trees in June and August. The leaves are a lovely bronze colour when they first emerge, darkening to green and turning orange and red in the autumn. Height: 6-8m. Spread: 4m.

A. 'La Paloma' AGM (H6) is a small, bushy tree that produces drooping racemes of white

flowers in April that look beautiful against reddy-bronze juvenile foliage. Its leaves turn a bright orange and red in the autumn. Height and spread: 4m.

A. lamarckii AGM (H6) is a spreading, graceful large shrub or small tree. It produces masses of white flowers on lax racemes and bronze-tinged young leaves that turn orange and red in the autumn. Its purply-black fruit is popular with birds and is soon eaten. Height: up to 10m.

A. ovalis 'Edelweiss' is a slow-growing, compact tree that has pinkish young growth and numerous large white flowers. It is a good specimen for small gardens and patios. Height: 4m.

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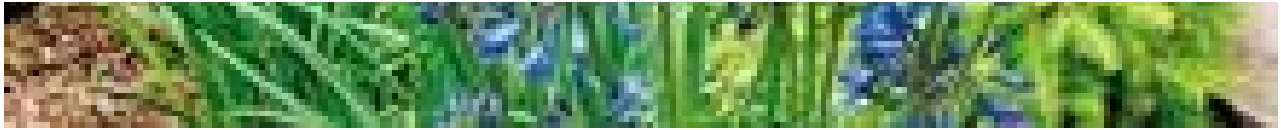
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