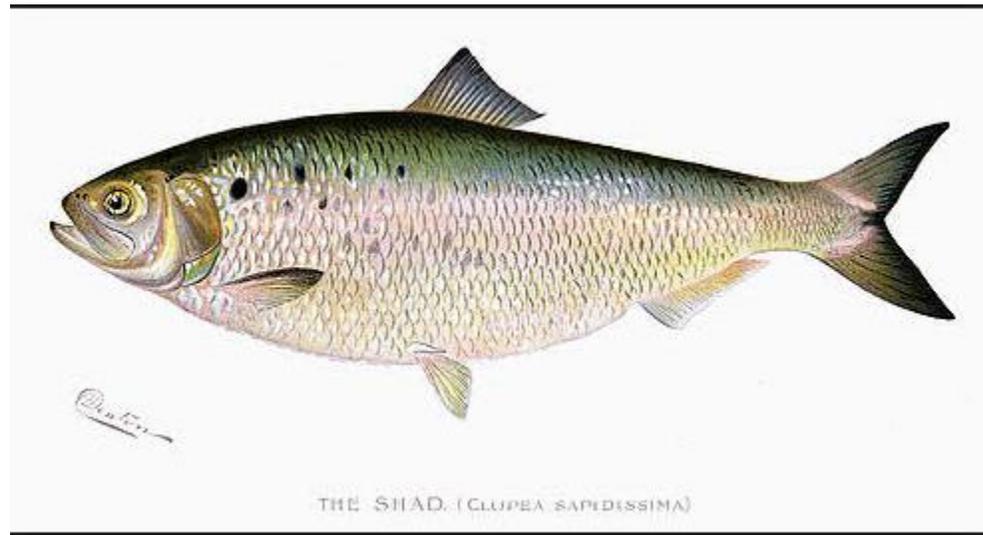


Shad run ongoing in Connecticut River Charles Walsh



For a number of years, my friend George and I have had a friendly but spirited debate about shad. George says shad, the official state fish of Connecticut since 2003, is one of the best-eating fish in the sea, or at least in the Connecticut River. George has eaten shad on several occasions, including during visits to the famous Shad Festival in Essex, where they cook the fish the old-fashioned way by nailing butterflied filets to big hickory planks that face a large open fire.

Every spring, the shad return from the open ocean to run up the Connecticut River to spawn. The run, which has been terrible for the past decade, is on right now. So far, things look encouraging for a stronger-than-normal run this spring. As one veteran shad fishermen told me Friday: "It's got to be better this year; the shad fishermen are not crying as much as usual." Restaurants along the Connecticut River report they have had shad on their menus for several weeks, and you can expect it to remain there through June.

Shad are an anadromous fish, meaning they begin their lives in freshwater but migrate to saltwater, where they spend the balance of their lives. Eventually, they return to their freshwater birthplaces to spawn and begin a new generation. The male fish are the first to hit the river followed closely by the females. It's all very romantic.

Unlike salmon that die after they swim upriver to spawn, female Shad can live to be 10 years old, and can return to the river four or five times to lay their eggs.

Native Plants 101: The Shadbush Story

Posted in [Adult Education](#), [Learning Experiences](#) on April 25 2012, by [Joyce Newman](#)

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One of the most wonderful native trees in our area is the Shadbush (*Amelanchier arborea*), which is sometimes called the Serviceberry, Shadblow or Juneberry tree. It's an all-season beauty, especially in a natural landscape setting, and just one of the many native plants you can learn about in the upcoming class, [Gardening with Native Plants](#).

The small tree features lovely grey bark and showy flowers, as well as terrific berries for pies and gorgeous fall color. But equally beautiful are the stories and folktales that have been associated with this tree for hundreds of years.

One story is that the first settlers in the New England area often planned funeral services at the same time that the tree bloomed. Its blooming was a sign that the ground had thawed sufficiently to be able to dig graves. So the tree became known as the 'serviceberry tree.'

Another story is that for thousands of years along the Hudson River Valley, the bloom time of the tree coincided with the massive spring shad fish run up the river to spawn. So the tree was called the 'shadbush' or 'shadblow.' Today, the shad fish population in the Hudson has declined to dangerously low levels, as have other Hudson River fish, and they are now at risk. But the trees have held their ground.

There's an award-winning children's book called [*When the Shadbush Blooms*](#), in which a young Lenape Indian girl fishes for shad and recalls a time when her great, great grandmother did the same. In fact, many Native American tribes used the plant for food and medicine and to make arrow shafts.

The journals from Lewis and Clark's expedition out west tell yet another tale. They are said to have survived on the berries when other food was scarce. Their journal entry of May 1804 lists the serviceberries as plentiful as the explorers passed near St. Louis, Missouri.

The dark blue-black berries that ripen in June make a [**delicious fruit pie**](#) and you can find recipes on several websites. In his *Manual of Woody Landscape Plants*, Michael Dirr writes that the Shadbush's ripe fruit tastes "better than highbush blueberries." And he notes, "I have had serviceberry pie and it ranks in the first order of desserts."

The Shadbush is just one example of a diverse group of native woodland plants, each with its own set of stories. A fine specimen grows along the main path just past the Azalea Garden.

You can discover many more native plants in the upcoming class taught by Brad Roeller, who has worked for many years as a landscape manager in the Hudson Valley.