

PLANTS FOR THE LAKE TAHOE BASIN



Western Serviceberry (*Amelanchier alnifolia*)

USES OF WESTERN SERVICEBERRY

Western serviceberry produces purplish black, edible fruit similar to a blueberry that attract birds and other wildlife. In the fall, western serviceberry adds beautiful fall color to your landscape. These shrubs also provide protection for birds and small mammals.

DESCRIPTION AND GROWTH CHARACTERISTICS

Western serviceberry is a graceful deciduous shrub that is distributed throughout the western United States, Alaska and Canada. It thrives in the well-drained, acidic soils of the Tahoe Basin. Deep green leaves have toothed edges, prominent veins, and whitish undersides similar to those of an alder. The foliage turns deep orange to red and yellow during autumn and falls off during winter months, exposing smooth gray branches. Western serviceberry blooms in early spring during or after the first leafout, bearing drooping clusters of white short-lived flowers. Clusters of six to twelve purplish green fruit ripen to red and finally purple black in the summer, falling off as they ripen.

ESTABLISHMENT AND CARE

To show off the flowers, form, and fall color of western serviceberry, plant in a sunny spot against the dark background of conifer trees. Western serviceberry works well planted alone as a specimen plant. Container plants establish rapidly and should be planted in the fall or in the spring after the danger of frost has passed, which in the Tahoe Basin is typically mid-June. Be careful not to plant serviceberry too close together, as they can grow up to five feet tall and wide. Avoid planting in windy areas or in compacted soils. If choosing a planting site in snow storage area, provide winter protection for the shrubs.

Before planting, if the soil in the container is dry, soak it and let it drain overnight before planting. Carefully remove the plant from the container so as not to break the root ball. Dig a hole that is twice as wide and six inches deeper than the container. When the native soil is rich in humus (organic material), mix a small amount of compost or slow release organic fertilizer in the base of the hole to help the roots become established. If the soil is poor in organic material, pre-mix the backfill soil with 50% native soil and 50% stable compost. When planting with compost, additional fertilizer is not needed.



Plant at the same depth as the container, and make sure the root crown is level with the surrounding soil surface. Tamp the soil at the base of the planting hole to keep the plant from settling after the planting depth has been set.

(continued on back)

For more information contact your local conservation district:

In California:

Tahoe Resource Conservation District
530.543.1501 ext. 113
info@tahoercd.org

In Nevada:

Nevada Tahoe Conservation District
775.586.1610 ext. 28
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Backfill the hole half way with soil and then fill with water. The water will help settle and firm the soil around roots, eliminating air spaces and providing good root to soil contact.

After the water has drained, finish backfilling the hole such that the upper level of back filled soil is even with the soil surface. When completed, the root crown should be level with the solid soil surface. Form a shallow watering basin around the plant by building a ridge of soil around the edge of the hole. This will contain the water and allow for a deeper penetration of the water.

To retain moisture, add a two to four inch layer of mulch (wood chips or shredded bark) around each plant. Keep mulch slightly away from the base of the plants to avoid rot.

During the first two years, it is important to consistently water to keep the soil evenly moist from spring until the soil freezes in fall. Staking and deadheading of western serviceberry is not necessary. Pruning of dead, damaged, or diseased branches can be done at any time of year. Pruning to control size can be done in late spring after several years of growth.



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