



# Sharp-eyed Science

## Track blooming saskatoon shrubs with Hands on Alberta and Alberta PlantWatch

**NatureLynx™** is an Alberta-wide citizen science application designed to support the collection of biodiversity data across the province. Use NatureLynx to explore the world around you—identify local species, learn about biodiversity hotspots, and connect with other curious people.

Using **NatureLynx™**, Hands on Alberta is a series of Alberta-wide citizen science missions allowing folks across the province to connect over a common goal. Together, the observations you collect will help monitor our province's amazing biodiversity.

### Your mission:

Together with PlantWatch - a citizen science project that has timed the annual bloom of plant species across the country for the past 33 years - we invite you to join us to investigate the spring bloom of saskatoons (*Almelanchier alnifolia*) in Alberta.

### How to participate:

**As always, participating is easy!** Simply download **NatureLynx™**, join the Hands on Alberta group, and find the SaskatoonWatch mission. During the month of May, snap photos of saskatoon buds and flowers in your community and tag them to the mission.

**Found a saskatoon that hasn't flowered yet?** Take a picture anyway! We are trying to identify the exact day saskatoons are blooming, so knowing when they haven't bloomed is just as important!

## Hands on Alberta SaskatoonWatch

Many people can't wait for the first signs of spring. But what exactly tells us that spring has sprung? Is it the change in daylight hours, the call of the spring Robin or, as the saying goes, "April showers bring May flowers"?

The blooming of wild or garden flowers can be a tell-tale sign that spring has arrived. But, how do plants know when it is time to show their flowers? Though plants don't have their own personal calendars, they do take cues from our changing seasons. Increasing temperatures in the spring drives plant growth and the opening of flowers. A warm winter and spring usually means early flowers and looking at seasonal variations in spring bloom can say a lot about our changing climate.



### *Saskatoon (Amelanchier alnifolia) in mid bloom.*

Photo courtesy Elisabeth Beaubien



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# Hands on Alberta Saskatoon Watch

Scientists who study these types of changes are known as phenologists, meaning they study “the science of appearances”. This means they are interested in the timing of specific biological events in relation to changes in season and climate.

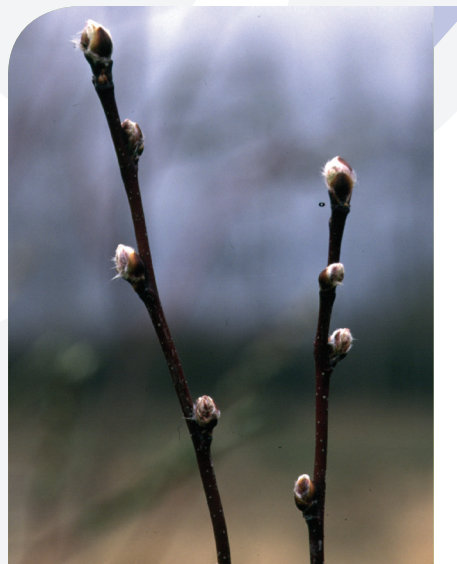
Looking at the timing of the different phases of the plant cycle can tell us a lot about our environment and how our climate might be changing. Changes in bloom time can have an impact on insects and pollinators, mammals, and even humans!

## Saskatoon and forest fires?

The flowering of saskatoon typically takes place at the same time our forests start to leaf out and turn green. This greening of our forests also marks the end of the dangerous (and expensive) spring fire season in Alberta. Have you ever tried to burn “green” firewood? A green forest means there is a lot more moisture, making it less likely to burn. So, tracking the annual bloom of saskatoon flowers could actually help Alberta reduce wildland fire costs by directing fire crews to priority locations at the right times. Understanding these types of relationships can help inform management decisions about spring forest fires.

## Curious to learn more about saskatoon and the art of plant watching?

To learn more about saskatoon and how you can get involved in Alberta PlantWatch, visit <http://plantwatch.naturealberta.ca/choose-your-plants/saskatoon/> or contact Elisabeth Beaubien at [e.beaubien@ualberta.ca](mailto:e.beaubien@ualberta.ca)



**TOP:**  
*Saskatoon (A. alnifolia) bud well before bloom. Note the reddish twigs and white hairs on buds.*



**Middle:**  
*Saskatoon (A. alnifolia) flower buds just before opening.*

*Capturing a photo the day these buds start to open is the ideal data for PlantWatch!*



**BOTTOM:**  
*A saskatoon (A. alnifolia) in full bloom.*