Heather Beds Winterized for 2019

by Mary Matwey

So far, the winter of late 2018 through the present, January 21, 2019, has been typical for south central New York state in zone 5; temperatures that range from mid 40°s to mid 20°s with little or no snow cover. That is until this past weekend when a big storm dropped 10" to 12" of snow and the temperatures plummeted to the single digits. The wind chill was fierce (-25° or more) and prompted Emergency Broadcasts of Winter Advisory warnings. My only consolation is that my heather are under the snow. The object of this article is to help get the heather through this winter with no to minimal damage.

I ran out of pine needles for mulching the heather and had to finish up by using shredded straw and boughs of one Christmas tree, not quite enough compared to past years. Normally chipped leaves, any kind, would have been scattered amongst the heather and lightly on top but leaf raking and chipping efforts were dampened by rain almost every other day this past fall. Truth be known, every leaf that fell on my yard or garden beds still remain, under with snow. If any of the afore mentioned conditions of zone, weather or heather bed mulching sound familiar to you, here is what I recommend:

- Evaluate the existing winter protection you've given the heather once the snow melts, if you're lucky enough to have it. Heather need to be protected from desiccating winds and vacillating temperatures. This time of the year, it may be hard to get your hands on natural mulch material so keep an open mind to man-made materials such as Remay® or burlap. It is a shame to lose heather because of your principals.
- Don't be too hasty to remove the winter protection. Do it a little at a time and keep it handy just in case.

This advice ought to get you through the winter to the point where you are ready to trim the heather. There are many trimming articles in the past issues of the Heather Notes which are all available on this website. Check out the INDEX files for the Heather Notes issues.