

Heather Notes

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New Garden Hazards Met

by Molly Martin

The author lives on an unpaved road and gardens very, very close to nature.

I don't have the statistics to confirm it, but bear sightings seem to be on the upturn here in southern Vermont. I've heard stories of bears climbing trellises to second story windows, checking out dinner on an outdoors grill and, of course, knocking down bird feeders. While they're not known to be aggressive around people, their increasing numbers and shrinking habitat are a concern.

Our particular bear was rather small, probably a yearling, all black with the characteristic brown muzzle. Its arrival one Friday evening in summer around 7:30 p.m. was announced by our Welsh springer spaniel's frenzied barking. The bear was unfazed by the noise and methodically made its way to the closest bird feeder. After sampling the seed, it lowered the support pole to the ground, sat down with the feeder in its lap and, with intense concentration, consumed the contents.

The next morning around 6:30 a.m. the bear came back and destroyed two more bird feeders. One was a cylinder model, which it pulled to the ground and held like a bottle in both paws, licking and sharpening until it was empty.

We didn't resurrect the feeders as I intended to forgo bird feeding for a while, but the chatter of protest from the grosbeaks, woodpeckers, finches and other regulars was too much to ignore. I threw a small amount of seed

out on the driveway just to maintain good will with these feathered regulars.

Saturday evening the bear returned, inspected the property, knocked over two empty bluebird houses, shinned part way up a tree to inspect an empty wren house and finally noticed the seed in the driveway. For lack of better fare, it delicately licked up the seed from both sides of the road, then lumbered off into the woods.

A final visit the following morning was the most intimate of all. The bear walked a tight circle around our house and even came up on the deck. Finding the larder completely empty this time, it sauntered off and hasn't—so far—returned.

Lessons to be learned are that sum-

The bear walked a tight circle around our house and even came up on the deck.

mer bird feeding may attract more wildlife than you want. Also, neither the barking of a house-bound dog nor the banging of pots and pans are protection against a hungry bear. Finally, always have film in your camera.

Northeastern black bears don't seem to have a taste for heather when there's "Flyer's Choice" on the menu. The bear hasn't been seen since, and there's no evidence except for the mangled bird feeders that it was ever here. By winter I'll have stopped expecting another visit, but for now my gardening is still affected by any rustling in the underbrush. ❖

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Lessons From the Wild Heathers

The final event on Saturday was a slide presentation by Donald Mackay on what might be learned about growing heathers in the garden from observing their behavior in the wild. The presentation was in three parts. First was a description of the varied ecological niches occupied by *Phyllodoce* and *Cassiope*, the mountain and moss heathers of the Pacific Northwest in their native haunts. Second was an account of the many ericas that make their home in Connemara in western Ireland; and third was a journey through the highlands of Scotland to see how heathers cope with such factors as sheep grazing, heather burning and peat cutting. The wild heathers here survive the effect of sea, sand and salt spray, competition with invading *Rhododendron ponticum* and the extreme weather factors encountered in these hills not so distant from the Arctic Circle.

The ability of wild heathers to co-exist with and take advantage of other vegetation was contrasted with our weed-free gardening ethic, and the possible protective effects of non-heather vegetation noted

1998 Conference Highlights

by Judy Doyle

The annual conference convened September 12 in Stockbridge, MA at Berkshire Botanical Garden. Business before pleasure was polished off early with unanimous approval of the bylaws revision (posted in the July newsletter) and election of officers, listed on pp. 4-5 of this issue.

Vice president Molly Martin stood in for the new president, Dick Loomis, who is recovering from an emergency

a northeast-specific slide show and script for the new Speakers' Bureau. Slides will be duplicated at NEHS expense and returned to the owner unless otherwise specified, she said.

She also called for the formation of three new committees for membership, volunteer coordination and communications/public relations in the new business year.

A tour of the BBG grounds, home of an NEHS heath and heather border since 1993, preceded lunch at the Red Lion Inn in downtown Stockbridge.

Garden tours to four private prop-
(Continued on page 7)



left to right, Molly Martin, Grace and Harry Bowen, and Joyce Desjoux at Berkshire Botanical Garden.

appendectomy. She asked members to submit slides of their heather gardens to Slide Library Committee chairman Harry Bowen, who is putting together



Gail Shaw plans to plant a maze beyond her rose garden next year.



The heath border at BBG greets visitors with a splash of color at the garden entrance, and proves the hardiness of ericas in the hills of western Massachusetts. It was planted in 1994 by NEHS members.

The Heather Detective: Brita Elisabeth

by Brita Johansson

Calluna vulgaris 'Brita Elisabeth': Height 40 cm (16") Spread 60 cm (24") Double deep heliotrope flowers, Aug-Sept, with dark green foliage. Broad habit. Found on Torre Moss, W. Sweden by Brita Johansson, after whom it is named. (Handy Guide to Heathers, 1998)

If you like to read about plants named after a person, I could tell you the story of *Calluna* 'Brita Elisabeth', for I am that person.

The plant was found in 1981 on the bog where we have also collected *Erica tetralix* 'Swedish Yellow', *Empetrum nigrum* 'Tore' and many other oddities. It is an area where they are digging out peat for gardens. On the cleaned parts of the bog there come up millions of heather seedlings, and the chance to find something unusual is much greater than in an established population.

My husband used to take long walks on the bog and brought me big bunches of flowering *Calluna*. The flowers in this area have more blue color than what is usual in England and even in other Swedish places.

The first time I could walk on the bog (my hip joint, you know) together with my husband, my steps were stopped after a hundred meters or so by something at the side of the track. A double-flowered plant—yes, it was! It was pleasing of course, but I was not especially excited because I didn't know then how rare such a thing is.

At that time I didn't know much about heather propagation. I took cuttings but of course they didn't root. The plant was at least five years old, probably more, which can have made rooting difficult. We found the plant again the year after and took new cuttings—which didn't root.

In 1983 there were only a couple of branches alive and again we took cuttings. It is possible that the plant had realized now that it was time to set its house in order, or maybe I had acquired a little more skill. Anyway, the cuttings rooted. In the summer of 1984 I had seven tiny plants. Two of them went to heather friends. The remaining five spent the winter in pots put on the ground in shelter from the wind close to a stack of wood. Needless to say that I would never treat a plant that way today.

When the impatiently awaited spring sun melted the snow, it revealed five pots from which stuck up a short stem with some bare twigs. The woodpile had been a winter home for a family of voles who had found the nearness to the larder most convenient. I praised my sense to have given away the two plants until I learned that they both had perished, though for other reasons.

I was on the way to let the plants go on the compost heap, but turned a pot upside down and couldn't see any damage to the roots. The pots were left where they stood, and in July new growth appeared. By the end of the autumn the plants were not too bad. We found for the last time the mother plant, and again took cuttings. Propagation was no longer a problem.

We sought after the mother plant each time we were on the bog but couldn't find it, so we assumed it had been destroyed by the big machines used for peat digging. But...

In 1992 Anne and David Small were in Sweden and we walked on the bog together. David suddenly stopped and said, "Here is a double plant!" It was the right place and the plant was identical to the now named 'Brita Elisabeth'. It was eight years after we had seen it for the last time. We still don't know how this was possible. ♦

Karla Lortz offers this cultivar for sale by mail order from her nursery, Heaths & Heathers, 502 E Haskell Hill Rd., Shelton, WA 98584-8429

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in aiding the germination and growth of heather seedlings.

With such a wide range of influences in play, it would be foolhardy to say the lessons are obvious and immediately applicable to the garden. If nothing else, there are plenty of observations that can be made to fuel informed speculation on how best to grow and maintain a heather garden, as well as to inspire the creation of new garden displays the emulate, at least in part, the grand designs of nature.

Slides showing close-ups of the wild heathers found on the Connemara bogs were graciously provided by Ken Hutchins of Corvallis, OR. ♦

What's New?

A splendid heather pruning tool, sturdy and reasonably priced at \$22.50 is the **Hedge and Topiary Shears** offered by Lee Valley Tools, Ltd. of 12 East River St., Ogdensburg, NY 13669, Phone 1-800-267-8735.

Christmas is right around the corner, so you might want to leave this page open for Santa Claus to read. ♦

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Back issues of Heather Notes
and several interesting
publications from the British
Heather Society are available
for a small fee.
Additionally, there is a supply
of out-of-print books
about heather, for sale
to members only.
For a list of items,
please contact the treasurer.

From the president

by Dick Loomis

As I write this we are having a glorious early September day. The late season flowers are in bloom, while most of the perennials look a little tired. The heather bed is the same as usual—neat and tidy, always interesting—with the seasonal change in bloom and foliage. Our heather bed is in the front yard and easily visible from the street. These marvelous little plants attract many visitors and neighbors who drive by to see them. Maybe I should put up a NERS membership application box. We have directed many of these visitors to our local heather nurseries.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Orlan Gaeddert for his leadership these past two years. There has been terrific response from the membership and there are many new people involved in the business of the society, a very positive sign. We now have a full slate of officers and board members, a Program Committee, Speakers' Bureau and we are expanding the NERS Membership Network. The new program committee is busy planning a series of events for next year, particularly the joint meeting in Maine next September. Come on out and join us for one of our meetings, increase your knowledge about our favorite plants, and have some fun. It is going to be an exciting year. **Heather Notes** has a new format, but remember this is your publication and it is no better than the articles you provide for it. So, take the time to write something about your experience with our favorite plants. Thank you, Orlan, and we expect to see you in the future!

It is time for all our members to consider making a contribution to our northeast-specific heath and heather slide collection. We have available to us some very fine slides to use for local presentations, but they are of UK and west coast gardens. We have been given a collection of slides that will form the nucleus of our own program, but we need many more, particularly from all over our region. You will be hearing more about this later, but why wait—go out and take some slides. Be sure to make notes about the plant or garden scene for a commentary to accompany the slide. Also include some shots of the heathers with companion plants. Let's show the rest of the gardening community how marvelous these plants are for our region. I have seen heaths and heathers growing all over the east coast, not only in the northern regions. There is some very nice *Erica carnea* 'Springwood Pink' at the Louis Getner Memorial Garden just north of Richmond, VA. That's a super place for you snowbirds to rest and have some lunch on your way north or south just off Interstate 95.

In the margins of this page you will see listed the names of the new officers and board members—welcome aboard! ❖

Letter to the editor

Dear Editor,

Thank you for the latest **Heather Notes**. A comment on Mark Starrett's article:

"If you ask for *Erica vagans* 'Alba' you will get the exact same plant." That you will not! There are numerous seedlings and selections of white-flowered Cornish Heath. All come under *f. alba*. There is no one such plant that has been fixed as 'Alba', so what nurseries sell under that cultivar name will vary.

Yours sincerely,

David McClintock
Kent, England

Dr. Starrett replies-

I obviously chose the wrong example to use in this instance. If a plant is written as a cultivar—indicated by single quotes—then it should be the same wherever you go. Unfortunately I had no idea that the **cultivar** (*E. vagans* 'Alba') should actually be written as a **form** (*E. vagans f. alba*), as I have only

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The Plant Doctor

by Donald Mackay

Dear Doctor,

I've volunteered for the *NEES* speakers' bureau, but I don't want to sound like an idiot with my pronunciation of heather names. Beyond *ERIC-ah* and *cah-LOON-ah*, I'm on very shaky ground speaking the *Erica* specific epithets and some of the cultivar names. Would you help me out with the following list? M.B.R., Massachusetts

Dear MBR,

No one knows for sure how Latin was pronounced, and rest assured there are no ancient Romans around to correct you. You can pronounce plant names the way that best conveys the spelling to your audience.

Under the rules of Classical Latin, *Calluna vulgaris* is kal-loon-ah wool-gar-is and *Erica cinerea* is ay-ree-ka kee-ray-ray-ah. However, as well as the Classical Latin taught in schools, there is also Church, Continental, Italian and Botanical Latin with their own pronunciation schemes. Adding it all up, the following pronunciations can be suggested for bashful or insecure speakers:

spiculifolia	spee-COO-lee-FOH-lee-ah	erigena	ay-ree-GAY-nah
vagans	VAH-gans (WAH-gans if you went to Eton)	cinerea	kee-NAY-ray-ah
tetrafilix	TET-ra-lix (not tet-RA-lix)	daboecia	dah-BEEK-ee-ah
carnea	kar-NAY-ah	and watsonii, williamsii	- say the name, plus ee-ee.

With cultivars we must take heed of the circumstances and often the nationality of the name. Thus:

Alportii	Alport plus ee-ee (surname)	Cuprea	koo-PRAY-ah (classic Latin)
Myretoun	MIRE-toon (Scottish)	Soay	SOH-ay (Scottish)
Beoley	BEE-lee (English)	Kerstin	CHER (as in church)-stin (Swedish)
Kinlochruel	KIN-loch-ROO-ul (Scottish, with the German ch sound)		

Botanic Latin is becoming more Anglicized as English becomes the *lingua franca* of scientific communications. So within reason you can use English sounds for words you don't know, and English pronunciations of Latin names commonly taken into English, e.g. si-NEER-ee-ah for cinerea. Otherwise, my advice is to pronounce each syllable separately, to remember each vowel has its own syllable, and, especially, not to run consonants into the wrong syllable by the use of explosive stress.

You may be under explosive stresses when you speak, but if challenged you can always reply, "That's what I learned at Eton." - or at Heidelberg, in the Vatican, etc. ❖

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seen the plant listed as a cultivar. If this is the case, then the nursery trade that catalogs and sells these plants should update their records to be more accurate, and propagators should start making selections of this form and start naming them as cultivars, i.e. *E. vagans* f. *alba* 'Selection #1'.

I appreciate the fact that Dr. McClintock read the article and spent the time and effort in responding. Although I am not a plant taxonomist by profession, I have basic working knowledge of taxonomy but rarely get

into specifics as Dr. McClintock has. I wrote the article as general information suitable for readers of **Heather Notes**, not as a taxonomic treatise of heath and heather. Obviously, I made an error in my estimation of the readership, and I'm glad you brought this to my attention! ❖

Letters to the editor are always welcome, as are questions to **The Plant Doctor**. Please send queries—linguistic, cultural or medical—c/o the editor at least one month prior to publication deadlines.

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All submissions to *Heather Notes* will be considered for publication, and may be edited for clarity and length. Please include your name and phone number so that you can be contacted in the event that more than minor editorial changes are necessary.

Deadlines for each issue:

January.....Dec. 20
April.....March 20
July.....June 20
October.....Sept. 20

A Garden Gate Swings Open ...Briefly

North Hill, the southern Vermont garden of Joe Eck and Wayne Winterrowd, horticulturists, garden designers and authors, will be open briefly to the public in 1999. The book, *A Year at North Hill*, describes how they succeeded in bringing this garden to maturity despite the daunting challenges of Vermont's rocky topography and sub-zero winter temperature.

The intensely cultivated garden of seven acres was started in 1977. Individual collections include heathers and dwarf conifers, bamboos, antique roses, hybrid magnolias and an extensive rock and bog garden. (White Flower Farm offers a strain of primroses developed at North Hill and features a picture of them in its catalog.)

The garden will be open next year from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. on Wednesday, June 30; Saturday, July 31; and Tuesday, Aug. 31. Anyone in the vicinity of the Massachusetts-Vermont border interested in seeing this unusual garden should send a request for tickets (limited to two) specifying their first and second choice of dates, with a stamped self-addressed envelope to: North Hill, Brattleboro Area AIDS Project, PO Box 1486, Brattleboro, VT 05302. Requests are accepted after January 1; tickets and directions are mailed in April. ❖

More Companions for Early Spring

by Joyce Descloux

The author described her favorite companion shrubs and bulbs in the summer issue of Heather Notes, and now offers her choices of perennials that can best complement an early Erica display.

Now some early flowering perennials. They range in height from the 18-inch hellebores to a diminutive stemless apricot violet. All were out

I gaze down on them in disbelief as they bloom, along with the ericas, unfazed by cold in the teens and late snowstorms.

before April first. I have had them all for years, so can vouch for their hardiness and dependable bloom.

First and absolutely foremost are the *Helleborus orientalis* hybrids. Lenten roses open in mid-March here. My first, purchased in 1979, had many-fingered evergreen leaves and was loaded with yellowish pink rimmed flowers (actually they are bracts) which lasted for weeks. This year it had 50 stalks and a girth of three feet. I have since added purple and pink shades which echo those of the ericas. All seed themselves around. They like heavy, moist soil and grow in shade right below the picture window where I can gaze down on them in disbelief as they bloom, along with the ericas across the driveway, unfazed by cold in the teens and late snowstorms.

Next in size is *Trillium sessile*, common toadshade, so named for the mottled pattern of its bluish leaves, and also, I guess, because toads like to sit in

its shade. A handsome and unusual plant with three-petaled maroon flowers sitting atop a ruff of three large leaves. I also have a lemon flowered version, *T. lutea*. Both have made large clumps after 10 years. First-rate, much undervalued plants for part shade.

Epimediums, barrenwort, are much in vogue right now, with many new ones being discovered in Tibet and China. They are hardy, dainty groundcovers for part shade. The first to bloom here is the hybrid 'Sulphureum' which sends up 10-inch panicles of yellow florets through its old foliage which is evergreen in milder climates, but has turned a soft coppery shade in my garden, nice with the blooms which resemble clouds of miniature daffodils. Pink and white sorts soon follow.

Pulmonarias, lungwort, are invaluable for early pink and blue bloom. There are hybrids and cultivars with fancy leaves and fancy prices, but you can't go wrong with the old-fashioned common kinds. They start out as small plants blooming close to the ground, but as the weather warms they grow larger. Long-blooming.

Blue-eyed Mary, *Omphalodes verna*, has small incredibly bright blue flowers on six-inch stems. A patch of blue sky come down to earth.

Green-and-gold is the common name as well as an apt description of an eastern American wildflower, *Chrysogonum virginianum*, with blossoms like little sunflowers on four-inch stems nestled in a packet of shiny leaves. Good under deciduous shrubs. Goes dormant in summer.

My last perennial is a tiny evergreen violet that has made itself at home at the base of the wall along the drive. Delicate apricot flowers appear in March. It's neat and tidy, spreading, but not invasive. Wish I knew its name.

Remember that most early spring bloomers prefer to be moved and planted in early autumn. Summer is the time to think and plan, and now is the time to act. ❖

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erties in the Stockbridge area were the real highlight of the day.

Gail Shaw Our first stop was just around the corner from Berkshire Botanical Garden. Gail had flown in from Chicago that very morning, yet she graciously welcomed us. Along the country road in front of the house is a graceful flower border; a picket fence sets off the formal herb garden in the front yard. Around one side, past luscious roses to the shady back gardens, we found naturalistic plantings, leading to and surrounding a pond with waterfall. Gail told us that she has gardened for only three years. Looks like she has the hang of it. Her dream is to develop a maze down in the wildflower meadow along the house. Tell us when it's ready, Gail! We'll come back.

Georgette Rousseau describes her garden as a "design for a difficult site." Her beautiful home is nestled into ledge, and rock gardens are just right for the site. There are many unusual plants here, charmingly creeping through crevices and cascading over walls. Georgette uses containers very well; they enhance her patio area. We all envy her huge workshop/potting shed/playroom. Georgette would love to learn more about heathers. Could be a convert here. Thanks for a great tour!



Georgette Rousseau greets the guests.

Jane and Jack Fitzpatrick's lovely estate grounds feature a long perennial border, leading to a secluded arbor where we all felt inclined to "set a spell." A few steps down was a shallow pool with fountain, and straight out was a very beautiful vista of meadows and hills. We all agreed that these grounds were perfect for entertaining or just

relaxing. (No heathers, though.) A very enjoyable visit.

Vickie Merton's house is a triumph of architectural engineering; her gardens define optimum site design. It's all charmingly nestled in a bowl of rock outcroppings on the side of a mountain. The almost perpendicular side yard rises up from the entry area and is skillfully planted with plants that thrive in these conditions. Vickie must bring mountaineering gear along with her trowel when she gardens. Out back, an enormous low deck brings us to the path to the lower gardens—and I do mean lower. They meander gently along the side of the mountain, and there's even a



Vickie Merton grows heathers on steep terrain.

pool with cascading waterfall tucked along the path. It's all pretty terrific, but Vickie also enjoys what has to be the most spectacular vista in Massachusetts—maybe all New England. *And she has heathers!* Thanks for having us.

Gaeddert On Sunday we headed into New York to see the Gaedderts' gardens. At last, many heathers to see. Judy Wiksten brought out the society's photo album to show us this heather garden in its infancy just four years ago. The many varieties are thriving, have filled out and sometimes overlap each other, creating an overall effect of a soft undulation of color and texture.

Thanks to Molly and Judy for making the arrangements and tending to the details that contributed to a delightful weekend meeting new friends, renewing old ties and learning more about heather gardening. ♦

1999 Meeting Dates Announced

Winter Meeting

The date is Jan. 31, at a site to be announced, when we will get down to work organizing a slide program to illustrate heather gardening in the northeast. Members are encouraged to bring slides of their own or other regional gardens.

Spring Meeting

This will be a pruning work session at The Fells on Lake Sunapee, NH. In the morning there will be a meeting at the gatehouse of the former Hay Estate. The date is April 24, with a backup date of April 17.

Summer Meeting

The Brooklyn, CT nursery of Judy Doyle is a site convenient for the southern segment of our membership. Mark June 19 on your calendars, with a rain date of June 26.

Summer Picnic

This meeting without agenda is scheduled for July 31 back at The Fells in NH when we plan to admire the heathers in full bloom and identify some cultivars.

Annual Conference

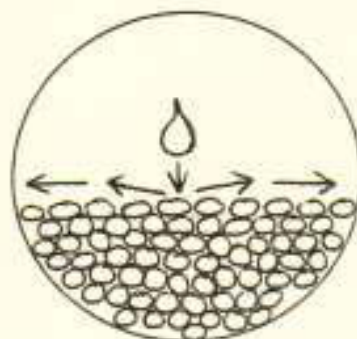
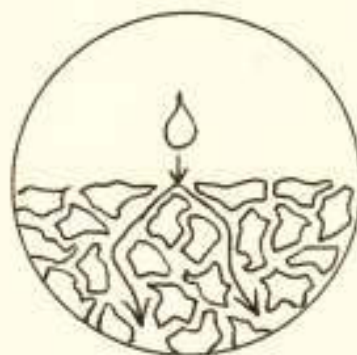
We will be hosting the North American Heather Society at a joint conference Sept. 17-19 in Camden, ME. Arrangements and program are being organized by Greta Waterman and Marjorie Walsh. ♦

The Last Word ...on mulch

by Lloyd Eighme

Dry spells in August or September could be damaging if I did not use bark mulch two or three inches thick. I have found that the coarse, unscreened bark often sold here as "mill run," though not as attractive, is best because its irregular shapes and sizes prevent surface layering that interferes with water penetration.

People frequently ask me why their heather plant died when they so carefully mulched with lovely, pure peat moss or bark dust. They do not realize that those fine, uniform particles form a smooth surface layer that sheds water like a roof. ❖



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