VOLUME 18, NUMBER 4

HEATHER NOTES



WELCOME, NEW MEMBERS

WELCOME, NEW MEMBERS

Mr. & Mrs. Douglas Brandon

Commerce, Michigan

Dean Greer

Kingsport, Tennessee

Donald F. Shaw, Jr.

Unionville, Connecticut

OCTOBER 18-19 Annual Chapter Meeting Oxford, Pennsylvania

10/18 Afternoon tour of Longwood Garden. Evening membership meeting including election of officers and directors at the home of Paul and Jane Murphy in Oxford, Pennsylvania.

10/19 Breakfast with Paul and Jane Murphy and tour of their heather nursery

'Hickory Hill Heath & Heather'.

Kindly RSVP to: Mary Matwey

(607) 723-1418/ mmatwey@stny.rr.com

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MOLES, VOLES AND PUPPY DOG TOES

By Ken Hutchins

As I sit down to write, I look out the window and note that the recent rain and wind erased most of the yellow Big Leaf maple leaves from the scene. Since the alders contribute little to Autumn's annual color-guard ceremony, the valley's color scheme is rapidly into the blue, green, and brown of winter. The sun has just come up and the wind is tilting a tall cottonwood tree to the west. Ah, and east wind in the morning, the "Yakima Express". It's going to be one of those crisp and clear fall days!

When I look to my left, out the living room window into the heather garden, I again see the color brown. Not from my much-loved heather. No, though they will be taking a small cat nap this month before the curtain rises on the next act called WINTER BLOOM. They are still beautiful. Yes, there are faded brown flowers on some plants, but the bud-bloomers are prime. The Erica ciliaris and Erica manipuliflora are keeping ahead of their russet fate. E. cinerea and Daboeciae are enjoying the second bloom. E. x darleyensis and E. carnea are giving a preview of things to come. The brown I'm seeing is not plants but dirt, lots of dirt!! At last, after much procrastination, I have finally started work on my wild heather moor and its accompanying stream.

You could call it the curse of the artist. You could claim I'm trying to play God, or you could just call it *Ken's Folly*. I really do not know why a man with a bad back, torn rotator cuff, and a very low budget still needs to build a 30" wide x 225" long stream with ponds and waterfalls. I guess it is because the scene requires it. Anyway, it is calling me to get out there and take advantage of this rare and mud less day before the rains begin once more.

I hope you had a good growing summer and that your heather brought you much pleasure and enjoyment. (For me)... it was the summer of moles, voles and puppy dog toes!

It started out with brown dead spots in the middle of my plants. Closer examination revealed broken branches and main stems. It did not take much detective work to ferret out the varmint responsible. He goes by the name of Cappy, my yellow lab. I guess I had better take some blame for not watching where I throw the eternal fetch toy.

I first thought that the rest of the problems were the result of a fungus with the typical brown bottoms on *calluna* but soon it was affecting all species. As soon as the summer heat arrived, more and more plants showed dead parts or the whole plant died. I looked for root weevil damage on the trunks and lower branches but saw none. We have wonderful well-draining soil here but I still checked for root rot. It wasn't until I stepped near the crown of a half-dead heather and felt the ground give away that I finally had my answer-MOLES!

Now I know that this area with its good soil is known for its molehills. Sometimes the parks, lawns and pastures look like a war zone with hundreds of mini-bomb craters. I also know that moles do not eat plant roots but are only after the grubs and earthworms. Several molehills have been seen on my property especially on the unfinished areas of my yard, but I ignored them or thought I did not have time to control them. Either way, they did not seem to be hurting any plants, and evidence of activity in the heather beds was negligible. So much for living with nature! Once the culprit was revealed the mystery of the plant damage became apparent.

Moles dig tunnels to get from one area to the next. Along the way they make side tunnels from which they push out the excavated dirt. Here in Mossyrock the main runs are deeper than they are in other areas, possibly because of the loose soil.

Continued page 4

Heaths & Heathers • Rare Conifers

Japanese Maples • Perennials

Unusual Trees & Shrubs

Alpines & Xeric • Bamboo • Ferns

Grasses

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Just as this newsletter was wrapped up and heading off to the printer, UPS delivered my hot-off-the-press edition of 'Gardening With Hardy Heathers', the new book by Ella May Wulff and David Small. I've only had time to quickly skim through the many chapters, enough to convince me this book is a very good investment for anyone with more than a passing interest in growing heather. Beautiful, fascinating, thorough coverage of every aspect of heather from historical uses through modern growing techniques.

-Editor

FEATURED PLANT

Calluna vulgaris

JOY VANSTONE

This beautiful heather variety, named after Mrs. Vanstone, Lowson Ford, Warwickshire, England, has lavender flowers from August through September. The foliage is straw-colored in summer and orange in winter. It grows to a height of 12 inches and spreads to 20 inches. Grow as a bright accent plant or combine with other plants with yellow, cream and/or bright green foliage and flowers.

Do you grow this heather? We'd like to know. Write to Judy Doyle, 19 Beckwith Street, Danielson, CT 06239; perennialherb@sbcglobal.net



OFFICERS

President

Mary Matwey 7 Heights Court Binghamton, NY 13905 (607) 723 1418

mmatwey@stny.rr.com

Vice-President

Bill Dowley
28 Hurricane Road
Keene, NH 03431
(603) 355 8801
wdowley@ne.rr.com

Treasurer

Peter Matwey 7 Heights Court Binghamton, NY 13905 (607) 723 1418 pmatwey@stny.rr.com

Secretary
Suzanne Barnes
9 Giles Street
Binghamton, NY 13905
(607) 770 9414
scbee9@aol.com

Correspondence Secretary

Molly Martin PO Box 14 Marlboro, VT 05344 (802) 254 6209 molar56@sover.net

Newsletter Editors

Content

Judy Doyle 19 Beckwith Street Danielson, CT 06239 (860) 774 4250 perennialherb@sbcglobal.net

Publishing

Jane Murphy
2473 Hickory Hill Road
Oxford, PA 19363
(610) 883 2171
murphy1213@zoominternet.net

FROM YOUR PRESIDENT

My Summer Vacation in British Columbia

In the world of heather conferences, it doesn't get better than this: 5 days of heather plants, lectures, gardens, and displays experienced with new and old friends. These visual and mental stimulants were followed by another 5 day whirlwind tour of some of the most breathtaking sites and gardens on the North American continent as we wove our way from Vancouver Island back to Seattle, Washington.

The first thing I did when I got home was to compare my east coast *Calluna* to the west coast *Calluna*. You will be happy to know that we in the east can grow them just as big and lush as they do in the west. The difference in our heather beds lies in the number of varieties of *Erica* that thrive in the northwest regions along with *Daboecia* and *Phyllodoce*. Their soil isn't really that much different than ours: rocks, clay and maybe not all that acidic either. They add organic matter and sand just like we do. However, their weather, lots of winter rain with only about 2 to 3 weeks of real cold, is ideal for growing heathers. We generally see our *Erica* blooms peeking out of the snow so it was amazing to see *Erica* blooming in August. *Erica vagans* and *cinerea* varieties are destined to become part of my heather bed.

Before I close this monologue I would like to relate to you some common bonds that we share with all chapters of the North American Heather Society and The Heather Society (based in Europe). All chapters are experiencing decreased membership while operating costs increase, and attracting a younger generation of heather enthusiasts is high on every chapter's priority list. Summing up the content of conference speaker* Brian Minter's talk, all types of gardening and all that it entails such as time, money and physical labor does not fit easily into the hectic schedules of the young and not so young generations. More people are working past the retirement age of 65 while working husband and wife households are now the norm. Since we cannot change people's lifestyles, we have to change our approach to education and exposure of heathers to the public. In targeting these generations of heather buyers we need to market new concepts: growing heathers in containers with filler plants that are destined to be discarded, much like the nursery prepared hanging basket or urn. We may consider this an outrage, but it may also be the only gardening that this generation can handle. We can't recommend these new concepts unless we ourselves try container gardening, mini groupings or a mix of heathers in our perennial and annual beds. See pictures in this issue of HN. If you are not already using these ideas, try them out, refine the combinations and then show them off. Maybe we can have a 'New Look of Heather' picture feature in this newsletter showing off your ideas.-Mary Matwey

*www.mintergardens.com ~~~~

Content Editor-Judy Doyle, 19 Beckwith Street, Danielson, CT 06239 *or* perennialherb@sbcglobal.net

DIRECTORS
Harry Bowen
Director Emeritus
18 Chase Road, Apt. A
Falmouth, MA 02540-2107
(508) 548 3113
JPNautilus@aol.com

Pat Hoffman PO Box 305 Swedesboro, NJ 08085 (856) 467 4711 njgardener15@hotmail.com

Ellen Holland 69 Hope Corson Road Seaville, NJ 08230 (609) 390 9143 ehheather@hotmail.com

Donald A.M. Mackay 135 Deerfield Lane Pleasantville, NY 10570 (914) 769 6553

Vivagean Merz 55 Upland Drive Falmouth, MA 02540 (508) 548 3282 vivagean@comcast.net

Paul Murphy
2473 Hickory Hill Road
Oxford, PA 19363
(302) 559-6052
murphy613@zoominternet.net

Alice Schaefer 27 Waverly Avenue Newton, MA 02458-2103 (617) 965-0546 puppetiris@aol.com

Priscilla Williams
35 Turner Road
Townsend, MA 01469
(978) 597 3005
phw@seedlingspecialist.com

There can be a large network of old tunnels underground that go undetected unless something causes the roof to collapse necessitating a repair. New tunnel extension is taking place on the backside of my house, but they still travel in the old area (my heather beds). My resident excavators also can feed just under the surface in their search for grubs and larvae. This activity does not leave hills and can be undetected in a bark-mulched bed. They also have a propensity for coming to the surface underneath things, as you well know if you have left a board on the ground for very long in mole country. All of these habits account for the damage done.

When Mr. or Mrs. Mole is surface searching for supper and an established heather plant is encountered, the root mass is tough to dig in, so they just skirt the plant, cutting off the roots from the layered branches. The amount of damage is directly proportionate to how close they are to the plant center. A near miss may look like a fungal attack. A left or right of center results in a dead half or a dip downward under the center will show as a dead strip through the center with live plant on each side living from the rooted branches until a dry spell dries up the top layer. Some showed a brown center but had no broken branch to implicate the dog, but a probing of the fingers in the middle of the plant discover an exit hole or soil plug pushed up from below.

One of my favorite heather combinations is three brilliant green C. vulgaris 'Caerketton White' surrounded by a half circle of deep red E. cinerea 'Providence' with a background of golden C. vulgaris 'Pat's Gold'. One evening as I walked in the garden (without Eve) I noticed two of my prized 'Providence' plants had croaked since my last visit. Examination showed plenty of moisture, no root weevil ring-barked stems, plenty of root growth and no obvious mole tunnel. So I got my shovel from the shed and disinterred the corpse for an autopsy. Sure enough, there was the telltale vapor trail of a passing turbo-trencher. It was long gone but to my surprise all of the roots that the plant had produced in its desperate attempt at recovery had been repeatedly chewed back. A closer look showed that another rodent, be it mouse, vole or shrew, had found the new digs a perfect little home with an Irish heather thatched roof. From the looks of the furnishings, she planned to raise her family there. Now we all know that our much-loved heather do not like their roots to be disturbed and that their soil cannot be allowed to go totally dry. I am sure both of these traits plus the salt from the rodent's rest room contributed to the demise of the late 'Providence' couple. Now do not get me wrong-I love nature!! That's why I live where I do. I don't have a deer fence, I just don't plant deer food. I love birds but I've trained my dog to chase away the woodpeckers. I will even go so far as being grateful for the moles for I believe they have contributed much to the formation of my super-draining clay loam soil. Some proudly politically correct person may tell me I should get down on my knees and beg for permission to plant my heather garden in the mole's back yard and shake his little pink claws to confirm a commitment of peaceful coexistence.

It is not going to happen! There are other loves in my life and he killed or damaged twenty-four of them this summer. Mr. Mole has got to Go!

-Condensed and reprinted with permission. Originally printed in Cascade Heather Society newsletter, Jan. 2008

More from Ken-

My yellow lab, aussie sheppard mix has been useless at mole control but has recently discovered vole hunting in the heather beds! Apparently there are plenty out there this winter so I expect to see the damage next summer. He spends hours out there listening and pouncing like a mouse hunting fox. It is fun to watch but I'm not sure who is losing the war. It's probably a toss up between the voles and the heathers! **Ken Hutchins** lives with nature in Mossyrock, Washington.

A HOT TIME IN MOLEVILLE

I recently unearthed this recipe in my ancient collection of garden tip clippings (probably from Jerry Baker, the home remedy king) and tried it this summer. Did it work? Hard to tell for sure, but there are no new tunnels in our yard since applying.

Mole Chaser Tonic-Mix 1 1/2 tbsp. of hot pepper sauce, 1 tbsp. of liquid dish soap, 1 tsp. of chili powder or red pepper flakes and 1 quart of water. Pour into mole/vole runways..."and they'll run away!".

~Judy

OUTSTANDING CHAPTER MEETING AND GARDEN TOUR

A dreary, rainy day turned out to be sunny and pleasant as we neared Florence Ma., the site of NEHS's September meeting. Dr. Richard Norris had graciously offered to host our board meeting and allow us to enjoy his garden. His garden by the way was an outstanding combination of large rock features, an herb garden laid out in a geometric design, an enclosure of wrought iron panels that featured succulents, a faux river bed and many unique shrubs and trees. Being the heather enthusiasts that we are of course the heather beds drew our keen attention. Dr. Norris had several large heather beds in various stages of maturity and it was very encouraging to talk with someone who had appreciated heathers long before he realized that there was a Northeast Heather Society to support him.

After the garden tour we conducted our board meeting on Richard's back patio under the wisteria pergola. There was a very good turnout for the board meeting and a brief summary of the topics and decisions follow:

The board approved the nominations for officers and directors for the 2008 thru 2010 term.

Bill Dowley volunteered to be the Public Relations Committee chairman.

Jane Murphy gave a schedule of events for the annual meeting to be held in October. (See Calendar, page 1)

Plans for planting of heather garden at Lasdon Park Arboretum in Katonah, NY were discussed.

Please remember that all Northeast Heather Society members are welcome to any and all of our meetings.

We would love an invite to visit *your* heather garden.

Contact me, Mary Matwey, 7 Heights Court, Binghamton, NY 13905. Tel. 607 723 1418. mmatwey@stny.rr.com

GARDEN TOURS GALORE

How do I briefly convey the wonderful time enjoyed by 2 dozen post-conference tour attendees? This tour was unbelievable! Stefani and Paul Dickey, and everyone else involved in the arranging of this excellent adventure, deserve a big round of applause. We experienced a four-day nonstop (yet relaxing), perfectly planned garden tour of the Pacific Northwest. We enjoyed visiting many public and private gardens, shopping at unique galleries, delicious meals, terrific accommodations, and wonderful traveling companions. Each site we visited was exciting and different in its own way.

After a relaxing ferry ride from Victoria, we arrived in Port Angeles, WA. Our tour bus took us over 5,200 feet above sea level to Hurricane Ridge where we enjoyed wild-flowers, trekking over patches of snow, and a breathtaking view. The next day was jam-packed with garden tours. The famous Little and Lewis Garden and Gallery, our first stop, is home to beautiful plantings and incredible pieces of artwork created by Little and Lewis. Linda Cochran's garden was next, a wonderful mixture of perennials, hardy tropical-looking plants, palms and woodland plants.

Heather beds greeted us as we entered the 150-acre Bloedel Reserve. Two highlights here were the Japanese Garden and Moss Garden. Next was a visit to Carol Johanson's garden, a beautiful fusion of Asian, Mediterranean, Northwest, and European styles.

Day three began with a tour of the Bainbridge Public Library's garden which was created 10 years ago by the Japanese-American community. Mesogeo was next -a 7 acre meadow, home to a Mediterranean and tropic plant propagation and garden design business. A wonderful lunch was served at the Shelton-Berndt garden with its magnificent views and plantings.

We were then on our way to Karla Lortz's Heath & Heathers (www.heathsandheathers.com) where it was quite impressive to see so many of our favorite plants on display and in full bloom. Everyone was busy taking pictures of her display beds and jotting down new favorites.

The last day's adventures included a tour of Bill and Dorina Sleep's garden, which has many heathers and an impressive view of the Puget Sound (unfortunately Mt. Rainier was hiding behind the clouds). Our next stop was Gary Schuldt's garden in Olympia. Gary turned a typical suburban front yard into a plant lover's delight (as well as a non-lawn person's delight). The Rhododendron Species Garden and Weyerhauser Bonsai Garden were the last stops on our tour. We enjoyed strolling in the peaceful garden and viewing the Pacific Rim Bonsai Collection.

I cannot end this article without commenting on a major highlight of our adventure - the camaraderie we all shared! We were a very diverse group from both the east and west coasts of the US; Germany, England, and Ireland. What a fun time we had, chatting on the bus, enjoying meals together, visiting the wonderful places mentioned above. To think, our love of heathers brought us all together and created so many new friendships!

~Pat Hoffman

COMMERCIAL GROWERS FORUM

Nine commercial heather growers met for an informal discussion during August's international conference in British Columbia.

We were a diverse group representing five countries and nursery operations ranging from very small (2000 plants) to large (>1000,000 plants). Those participating in the discussion were: Art Pilch, Sylva, North Carolina, USA. Art and his wife Judith produce about 2000 *Calluna vulgaris, Erica carnea and Erica x darleyensis* plants a year at their nursery in the mountains of North Carolina. They are a retail operation and also sell plants at local events.

David Edge, Forest Edge Nurseries, Dorset, United Kingdom. David, the new president of the British Heather Society, established his wholesale nursery in 1974. He currently produces 125,000 plants per year. He is focusing on new varieties and is creating topiaries from *Erica erigena*.

Aldert Bosch, Groningen, Netherlands-Although Aldert no longer grows heather, he used to produce 125,000 plants a year. Approximately two-thirds were *Calluna* with colored foliage and one third *Erica*. He stopped growing because heather is considered a "throw away" plant in the Netherlands.

Maria Krenek, Glenmar Heather Nursery Inc., Eureka, California, USA. Maria's nursery is in its twelfth year. She produces over 600 varieties. Her mix is 30% *Erica*, 30% *Daboecia* and 40% *Calluna*. Much of the heather she sells is in containers that coincide with the seasons (*i.e.* heather in jack-o-lanterns for Halloween). Because she has limited space, she 'root prunes' her plants rather than pot them up into larger containers.

David Wilson, Chilliwack, British Columbia, Canada. David has been in the nursery business over thirty years. He produces over 100,000 plants in 4" pots and over 50,000 plants in larger pots. He works with the winter-flowering *Erica carnea* and *Erica x darleyensis* to create new cultivars, creates amazing containers of heather cultivars, and also grows miniature roses. His business is mail order and wholesale.

Kurt Kramer and Anna Biermann, Edewecht, Germany. Kurt and his assistant Anna are hybridizers of heather. Kurt is a "rock star" in the heather world. He has worked extensively with the *Calluna* bud-bloomers, producing the group of bud-blooming heathers known as "Garden Girls". His dream is to produce a yellow-flowering, hardy hybrid heather.

Paul and Jane Murphy, Hickory Hill Heaths & Heathers, Oxford, Pennsylvania, USA.. Very new to the business, the Murphys produce about 7000 plants a year. They consider themselves to be "missionaries for heather" in the mid-Atlantic region of the USA. They grow *Calluna vulgaris* and *Erica*, with a focus on winter color in the garden.

Surprisingly, although there was some discussion around growing techniques, most of the forum focused on educating people about heather, and current market trends. One of the challenges facing heather growers is to find companion plants that are profitable to grow. This is a very competitive business and for some of us the market (for heather) is limited. We discussed the need for good press, by letting gardening magazines and events know of the versatility of heathers. One short-coming of heather is its limited growing area. In the USA and Canada many national magazines and garden shows have minimal coverage because heather can be grown in only one third of the North American continent.

Continued from page 5

Another challenge is the bloom time. One of the changes in nursery retailing over the past 10 years is to sell plants only when in bloom. With the *calluna* blooming in August (prime vacation time for consumers) and many *erica* blooming in winter, also a slow retail time, retail nurseries are reluctant to carry plants that are not blooming.

The most thoughtprovoking observation is that in our 'throw-away society', people in the USA, Canada and Europe are not putting plants in the ground. Eighty percent of the heather grown in Germany is never planted in the ground. Instead, people buy heather either in containers or to put in containers. When the season is over, the plants are thrown away. In Europe, consumers are "gobbling up" painted heathers (plants are sprayed colors appropriate for the season.) Growers from the USA's west coast and Canada were seeing the same trends.

The key, we all agreed, is education about the appeal of heather for those consumers who still garden, and developing eye-catching containers for consumers who want bright foliage and flowers for a short time.

Paul Murphy

LASDON PLANTING

After a year of planning, NEHS volunteers met on October 2 to install a heather garden in Lasdon Park Arboretum/Veterans Memorial, Westchester, New York. President Mary Matwey reports:

"The planting of heathers at Lasdon yesterday went off smoothly, thanks to all the bed preparation done by Donald and Bill beforehand. Pete's roto-tiller refused to cooperate so we all pitched in to dig and break up the soil a little more and add another bag of peat moss. Ted Koslowski * showed up and we talked for a bit during which

time he indicated his hopes that we would continue planting heathers in the rest of the old rock garden area next year.

The newly planted area is approximately 33 ft. x 9 ft. and contains 109 plants, 40 varieties. Lasdon provided the peat and sand and will provide bark mulch. Donald and Elaine will check to see that the mulch put on by the Lasdon garden staff is done properly and that the watering schedule is being maintained. The planting crew consisted of Suzanne Barnes, Bill Dowley, Donald Mackay, Mary and Pete Matwey, Elaine Miller, and Jane and Paul Murphy. The weather was great. Enjoy the picture." ~Mary Matwey *Lasdon Park Manager

COUNTY WICKLOW

You asked who has grown the featured plant *Calluna vulgaris* 'County Wicklow'.* Back in 1995 when I purchased my first 15 callunas from Rock Spray I ordered 3 ...'County Wicklow'. I'm happy to say that 13 years later I still have all 3! They seem not to mind the hot and humid summers and lack of snow cover in my zone 7 garden.

Although they aren't as full as they once were due to trimming of some outer dead portions and crowding by other plants, they still have maintained a nice shape and are flowering right now in mid-July. The majority of the other 12 that I purchased in 1995, which were all grown in the same bed, either lost their centers and died, or small sections of the plants have now rooted in and are beginning to fill out. My 'County Wicklow' did not die in the center as so many of my other callunas have over the last 13 ~Pat Hoffman years.

New Jersey

*July 2008 issue

KEEP YOUR HEATHER HAPPY

Here are condensed excerpts from a response by garden writer and NEHS member Joyce Descloux to a long listing of diseases in heather and chemical preventive treatments thereof, both printed in the June 1988 issue of the North American Heather Society's newsletter 'Heather News'.

"Provide your heathers a site with sun and moving air, where the soil is rich in humus. Maintain a year-round mulch of pine needles or pine bark mulch."

"Keep your tools, clothing (especially shoes and gloves) as clean as possible. Much garden disease is spread by lack of sanitation on the part of the gardener. Pruners should be periodically sterilized...."

"Never work or walk among your plants when they are wet. Particularly to prune or cut flowers. It is the cut stem which cannot dry quickly which is the entrance for disease. And jostling wet plants will discharge any mold spores they harbor, thereby spreading infection."

"A more healthy and....attractive plant is maintained by cutting the stems at various lengths to allow air circulation and sun to reach into the base of the plant. Try to respect the natural habit of growth...and strive to enhance it, rather than shearing or lopping indiscriminately."

"Inspect your plants regularly and immediately minister to those which seem to be ailing. Any diseased or necrotic tissue should be cut out, the clippings deposited in a plastic bag, not the compost pile."

"Before resorting to commercial chemicals, why not try a few of the old-fashioned home remedies gardeners have used for centuries? They are often more effective and certainly less expensive and dangerous to use. For instance, soak pine bark in water overnight, then shower the heathers with this. I have also used various aromatic herbs such as rosemary, thyme, sage, lavender, garlic and onion with beneficial results, not only for ill-looking plants, but as a repellent for deer (it works!) and also for insects and larvae which eat the plants."

"Be wary of fertilizers that stimulate disease-prone sappy growth."

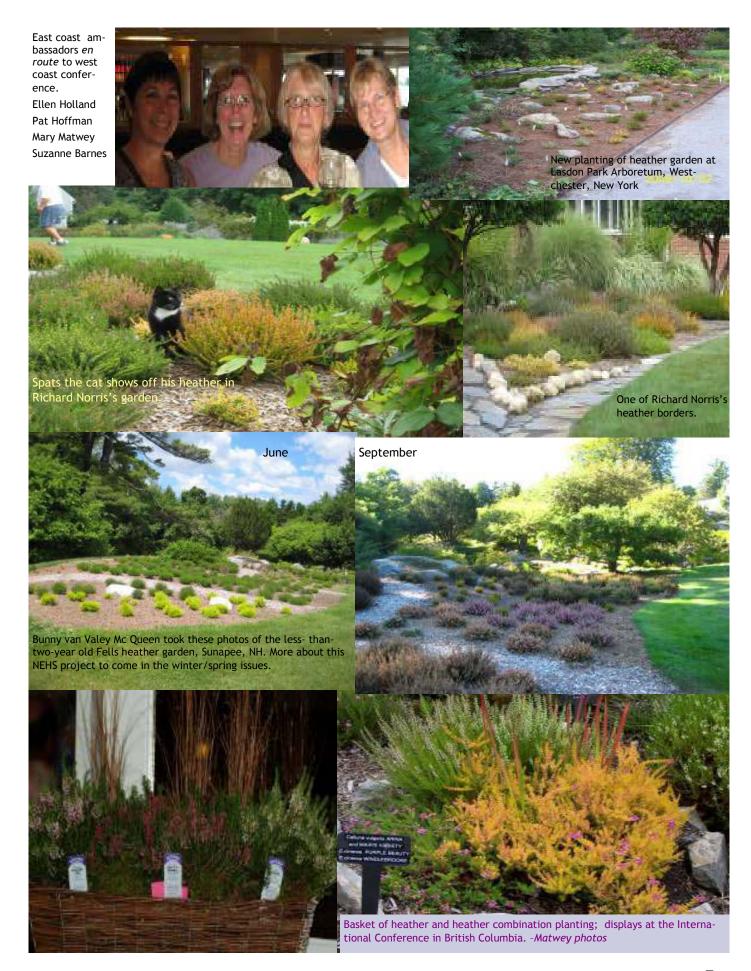
"Remember that heathers are colony plants. They love their own company best, close but not crowded. Keep them to themselves, away from other plants, even dwarf evergreens, which may harbor diseases and pests."

"Keep your plants healthy and happy, and they will rarely have any problems. When they do, learn why, and act quickly to correct the problem, so that it does not get out of control, leading to any unhealthy alliance with toxic substances. This keeps the gardener healthy and happy, too."

HEATHER BOOK RELEASED

The new book on heather by David Small and Ella May T. Wulff, 'Gardening with Hardy Heathers' is now available for purchase, either through the publisher, Timber Press, or other book vendors such as amazon.com.

Timber Press, 133 SW 2nd Avenue, Ste. 450, Portland, Oregon 97204 USA. Telephone:1-503-227-2878. Fax: 1-503-227-3070. www.timberpress.com



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The purpose of the Northeast Heather Society is to foster interest in growing heathers (*Calluna*, *Erica*, *Daboecia*, *Cassiope*, *Phyllodoce* and *Andromeda*) in northeastern North America, by serving as a conduit of educational information for both the experienced and the novice gardener.

MEMBERSHIP in the Northeast Heather Society is open to anyone who pays dues to this chapter. Membership benefits include: a subscription to this quarterly newsletter, participation in chapter meetings and elections, borrowing privileges for slide/power point presentations, and, most valuable of all, contact with fellow heather gardeners who mostly live in or near your growing zone, all willing to share helpful advice and their experiences.

Dues: \$15 a year. \$28 for a two year membership; \$40 for a three-year membership. Remit payment to: Peter Matwey, Treasurer, 7 Heights Court, Binghamton, NY 13905

HEATHER CULTURE PROGRAMS are available. For slides, contact: Harry Bowen, Falmouth, MA. Tel (508) 548 3113.

For digital presentations, contact Bill Dowley, Keene, NH. Tel. (603) 355-8801; wdowley@ne.rr.com

WEB INFORMATION: North American Heather Society website: www.northamericanheathersoc.org

Click on 'Chapters' to find the Northeast Heather Society (NEHS) chapter page.

ADVERTISING: Quarter page ad: \$35 per issue; \$25 per issue if advertising in two or more consecutive issues.

Contact: Pat Hoffman (856) 467-4711; njgardener15@hotmail.com

BE A CONTRIBUTOR TO HEATHER NOTES:

Do you have a suggestion, a question, a story, an anecdote, a poem, or a photo to share? Contact the Content editor: Judy Doyle, 19 Beckwith Street, Danielson, CT 06239. Tel. (860) 774-4250. perennialherb@sbcglobal.net All material may be edited for clarity and length.

DEADLINES FOR EACH ISSUE:

March 20-June 20-September 20-December 20

