



We are a traveling group! Here's what's ahead in 2009.

APRIL means time to prune the heather. The following dates are scheduled for us to gather in public gardens with our knee pads and shears, to wow the crowds as our handiwork reveals fresh new foliage color. Many hands make light work. Come and join the fun.

APRIL 4 (April 11 Inclement weather date)

9:00 a.m. Lasdon Park Arboretum, Katoneh, New York

and/or

10:00 a.m. Fort Tryon*, New York City, New York

www.nycgovparks.org

APRIL 25 (May 3 Inclement weather date)

10:00 a.m. The Fells, Newbury, New Hampshire

www.thefells.org

(Our board of directors will meet during lunch.)

As always on pruning days, bring your own garden tools and don't forget your lunch!

Directions to all three sites may be found via MapQuest online.

Or, contact Mary Matwey, 7 Heights Court, Binghamton, New York 13905, Tel. 607 723 1418

DOON THE MOOR

*One morning in May when the fields
were gay,
Serene and pleasant was the weather,
I happened to roam some miles from
home
Among the bonnie bloomin heather*

*Doon the moor, roon among the
heather,
O'er the moor and through the
heather,
I happened to roam some miles from
home
Among the bonnie bloomin heather,
Doon the moor.*

*I trudged along with the lilt of a song
My heart as light as any feather
Until I met with a very bonnie lass
She was brushing the dew frae among
the heather,
Doon the moor...*

*'O,' said I, 'my fair lassie, where have
you been?'
Her name and place I scarce could
gather
She answered me by the bonnie burn
side
'A-feeding of my flocks together.'
Doon the moor...*

*barefooted was she, and trig and
clean
Her cap as light as any feather
With a tartan plaid hanging neatly
round her waist
She tripped through the bloomin'
heather.
Doon the moor...*

*We tiggid and toyed from morn till
e'en
It being the langest day in summer,
Until the rays of the red settin' sun
Came trinklin' doon among the
heather.
Doon the moor...*

*She charmed my heart and pleased
me e'en,
I ne'er can think on ony ither
If I was a king she would be queen,
The lass I met among the heather
Doon the moor...*

In This Issue

*Jane and Paul Murphy will bring live heather plants to sell at Fort Tryon, from their Pennsylvania nursery 'Hickory Hill Heath & Heather'.

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FEATURED PLANT

Calluna vulgaris 'Spitfire'

This heather has red foliage through the winter into spring.

From August through October, the flowers are mauve, with gold foliage turning orange in the fall. It is a bushy plant, spreading about 12", and staying only 6" high, thus suitable for edging the garden bed, and a good candidate for containers.

The Heather Guide* comments that 'Spitfire' is "similar to 'Aurea'". The Guide's description of 'Aurea' indicates it too has mauve flowers. Its bloom time is from August to September—a shorter period than 'Spitfire'—and it is a little taller and wider: Ht. 20 cm. x Spd. 40 cm., or 8" x 16". Furthermore, the Guide states, "This cultivar is over 150 years old!"

*Editor's note-I use my wrinkled copy of the 1998/99 edition of 'The Heather Society's Handy Guide to Heathers', by David & Anne Small, for these featured plant descriptions.

If you would like to see a particular heath or heather cultivar featured, your suggestion is welcome. My contact info is on the next page.-Judy Doyle, Content Editor

Wayne Paquette is the owner of Quackin' Grass Nursery and a frequent contributor to Heather Notes. To my request for suggestions as companion plants for 'Spitfire' he replied: "*Picea abies* 'Doone Valley' (1'H x 2'W/10years) with *Fothergilla gardenii* 'Epstein Form (miniature form of *Fothergilla* 1 1/2 feet tall by 2 feet eventually) and *Chamaecyparis thyoides* 'Top Point' (miniature upright flame-shaped) and *Erica carnea* 'Aurea' foreplanted with *Vaccinium macrocarpum* 'Hamilton' (miniature Cranberry with stunning ruby/garnet fall/winter foliage) - wonderful grouping with all-year interest!

Thanks, Wayne!



This photo of a two-year-old 'Spitfire' was taken March 17, 2008, in Connecticut zone 5.

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FROM YOUR PRESIDENT

The Ties That Bind

Nine years ago I was a wet-behind-the-ears Master Gardener tapped for the job of Team Leader in Cutler Botanic Garden's Rock Garden and Heath & Heather Bed. I was unfamiliar with cultivar names and the fact that I could tell an *Erica* from a *Calluna* was a major accomplishment for me. Our team always seemed to be playing the name game as a double pink- blooming, un-named heather would appear smack in the middle of a swath of 'Martha Herman' long past its prime, or a September bloomer would show up among the spent 'County Wicklow'. These aliens didn't seem to match anything in the heather bed so it was with great hesitation that I accepted an invitation to view the late Dr. John Westcott's heather garden in Binghamton, New York, and to take heather cuttings before the property was sold. I was told that there were no name tags on the heather nor anyone who could help identify them. The fact that Dr. Westcott had donated heathers to Cutler's Heath & Heather garden made me feel that I owed something to this gentleman's memory. With a friend who had a friend whose backyard bordered the Westcott Heather garden, we passed through a hidden opening in the hedge and into the garden. It was just as I had envisioned, a very mature heather bed with plants grown into and over each other, but that is where I am going to stop with my half of this story.....

Just recently I was directed to an article written by Dr. John Westcott for *Heather Notes* (1997, V. 7 #1). Herein he describes how his rock garden, started in 1962, evolved into a heather garden 35 years later. He did this with the help of Walter Kolaga, owner and operator of Mayfair Nursery in West Warren, Pennsylvania, about 20 miles outside of Binghamton. Dr. Westcott obtained many of his heathers from Walter's nursery. Walter himself was an accomplished heather breeder and author/expert on rock gardening. Mayfair Nursery introduced *Calluna vulgaris* 'Mayfair' and C.v. 'Juno' (named after Walter's wife June). Kolaga wrote 'All About Rock Gardens and Plants' and in this book gave great praise to the use of *Erica* and *Calluna* in the rock garden.

Dr. Westcott was also a successful propagator of heathers and many of his favorites such as C.v 'Ellie Barbour', 'Alportii', 'Alba Plena', 'Crispa' and 'Mayfair' are still alive in Cutler's heather bed to this day (whether they were donated by him is unclear).

The point of this whole story and its relationship to the current efforts to archive the Heather Notes is: there is so much history locked up in the *Heather Notes* of our past and present that I bet many NEHS members, like myself, can find a personal tie that binds.

Book Review:

Walter Kolaga's book, "All About Rock Gardens and Plants" is available as a used book from www.amazon.com, starting as low as \$.99. I bought the more pricey offering fearing torn pages and water marks at the \$.99 offering. I have found it to be a wonderful reference book on rock garden design, soil and plants. A welcome addition to my library.~Mary

DON'T BE PRUNED! WE WOULD MISS YOU!

CHECK THE EXPIRATION DATE NEAR YOUR ADDRESS.

Send your renewal to Treasurer Peter Matwey, 7 Heights Court, Binghamton, NY 13905

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REGIONAL REPORTS

HAMILTON, MASSACHUSETTS ZONE 6

Here we are in the middle of March and we are all looking forward to a real spring—heathers and humans. Through the winter months in this area of the North Shore temperatures seldom went below -20° F. or a couple of times in the low teens but luckily the covering of snow was an ideal protection for heathers. As I write this 17th March outside it is 45° with sun. When the last snow melted (except for patches here & there in the garden) my rather new heather patch (+- 250 plants and nearly 4 years old) looks quite healthy and of course I am hoping not to have any serious frost periods without the snow covering.

As it is now it will be mostly a clean-up job, raking the leaves from the foliage and between plants.

Last fall I added an area across the grass path from the original area—mostly the new piece will be intended for a bit of rock garden with *Erica carnea* ‘Springwood White’, which was a bit of a nuisance in my previous garden in the Netherlands because of its endless running habit. At the moment it is just a reminder of white snow, but of course not snow.

Also last fall I moved a patch of *Erica vegans* ‘D. H. Maxwell’ and ‘Lyonesse’ to another section of the heather area which has a little more shade and a more favorable winter protection.

Right now I am seeing color in the flowers of *Erica x darleyensis* ‘Kramer’s Rote’, the buds of *E.c.* ‘King George’ and ‘March Seedling’, and the foliage of *E.c.* ‘Vivelli’ and *Calluna vulgaris* ‘Cuprea’ and ‘Silver Knight’.

With favorable growing conditions, summer and winter, it will probably take another 2-3 years for all these plants to grow together. Time will tell. One consolation too is that once the heathers are deeply rooted and grown together they require very little water—at least much less than lawn grass—so we heather enthusiasts are environmental minded or not?

The new publication ‘Growing Hardy Heathers’ by David Small and Ella Mae Wulff is helpful too—interesting reading and reference.

~Ann Driesen

BINGHAMTON, NEW YORK USDA Zone 5

MID MARCH

Three days ago the morning outside temperature was 8° and I haven’t wanted to uncover my heaths & heathers. This morning the temp was 33° with predictions rising into the mid 50s and all the snow has been gone for at least a month.

I have now peeked at the plants and sad to say I’m disappointed. Except for the heaths (*E. darleyensis* ‘Springwood White’ and ‘Pink’) which have many blossoming sections, most of the *Callunas* do not have much foliage that looks green. I’m waiting to cut to live tissue to assess more carefully, not trusting the lamb is here & the lion is gone.

This bed had a good snow cover through January when I then covered the remaining snow with boughs. We have had intermittent cold spells, warmer weather and rains since. Today was the 3rd day of sunny 60s this week.

I’ve checked 2 other beds in our area & found mixed results. One was in good shape with much healthy foliage and very little brown. This bed had collars of leaves around each plant.

The 3rd bed too had blooming *Ericas* and several of the *Callunas* were green throughout. However, others showed much browning quite far down into the plant. Perhaps sun damage, perhaps hardiness variations?

All beds were in full sun, fairly open. My bed however is at a higher attitude, possibly a factor. Next year leaf collars

-Carol Taren

HEATH AND HEATHER DESCRIPTIONS 101:A REVIEW

Erica Carnea

“A species of low, fully hardy, evergreen shrubs from the alpine regions of Europe with a spreading habit. It has linear leaves in whorls of four and bear tubular, generally pink, flowers in late winter to early spring. The flowering times of *Erica carnea* cultivars vary markedly, plants in milder climates being as much as two months earlier than those in colder conditions. Generally, they can be expected to show flower for 6-8 weeks.

It tolerates lime and a little shade. All cultivars are dwarf and, with few exceptions, rarely require pruning. Care must be taken when pruning as *Erica carnea* forms buds as early as July. It is safer to prune immediately after the flowers have faded. Prune around the edges and very lightly over the top of the plant. It is one of the hardiest of all heaths, suitable for hardiness zone 4.”

-The Heather Society’s ‘Handy Guide to Heathers’, by David & Anne Small, 1998-99 edition.

In their new book ‘Gardening with Hardy Heathers’ (Timber Press) authors Ella May Wulff and David Small advise for *Erica carnea* that “The plants will, nevertheless, be fuller and have longer flower spikes if they are pruned regularly to shape them and remove spent flowers.”

**An Agreeable Solution
BINGHAMTON, NEW YORK**

When the local Northeast Heather Society members came to trim the heathers at the Town of Chenango heather bed in the spring of '08 we found wheel tracks at the corner of the bed and a dozen or so dried leafless heathers. It was evident that the town grounds crew had been doing their job to keep the sidewalks around the heathers free of ice and safe for pedestrians. A few dead heathers are no cause to fault public safety.

Investigation found that the ice-melter used was salt-free and fertilizer-based. Even so it was not kind to the heathers, a few barberry bushes and a dwarf maple at the front entrance. The horticulturist at Cornell Cooperative Extension, Renee, said that short of removing all the soil near the edge, the spring rains would eventually leach out the salt. So after several rains we replanted and as the year progressed, the new plantings showed no signs of salt stress.

Relying on hindsight I decided to take measures in the fall of '08 to minimize the effect of de-icer on the heathers during the winter of '09. The only thing that came to mind was a barrier of some sort. Plastic was ruled out as being unnatural and extreme but the use of burlap for winter protection is commonplace around here so the decision was clear, a burlap surround. Now all I had to do was to get the town's approval to erect this barrier around the bed. Surprisingly they had no objection so my husband, Pete, and I hammered in 30" garden stakes with about 24" showing above the ground and then attached 36" wide burlap to the stakes with twist ties. We folded over the excess at the bottom thereby doubling the protection at ground level. After this we thickly piled pine needles at the base and on the heather side of the surround. It was all done in 1 1/2 hours worth of work. I visited the bed several times to see how the surround was holding up and was always happy to see it intact and a bank of snow at the base from plowing the sidewalks. Friends who visited the town hall commented on the wonderful winter colors but no one ever mentioned the burlap. I can only assume that they didn't find it unsightly as the 24" high barrier did not prevent them from admiring the heather. Recently the weather moderated with ample rain melting much if not all the snow and the damage to the grass around the sidewalks was clear. A town official brought this to my attention last week as he thanked me for the protection measures around the heather. It's still too early to pat our selves on the back but as the pictures show,

the heathers with little bit of protection have a better chance of survival than the grass.

~Mary Matwey

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**Lasdon Park Visit, Katoneh, New York USDA Zone 6**

March 7, 2009

After two unseasonably warm days, much of recent heavy snow has melted. Still snow patches at Lasdon, but not in the heather garden. No ice in fish pond. Heathers looked good, probably benefited from small balsam branches laid on heather, due to suggestion of Mathilda Mosleh to Lasdon staff.

Met Tully and Mike there, who wanted to know when to remove balsam branches. I said wait for one more snow storm, then let April 4<sup>th</sup> pruners decide.

Mike has sprayed RoundUp and increased potential size of heather bed by two to three times. Lots of rocks revealed to show old rock garden. Lots of sedum still around. Rocks will make digging difficult.

Did some pruning of about 20 heathers in Synoptic bed. All in fair shape. 'Silver Knight', 'Tib' and 'County Wicklow' looked good. Erica x mediterranea (a group of 3) showed some damage, mainly split stems, which were cut out. Very little bloom; buds rather dried out even when stems not split.

Large E.x mediterranea situated by fish pond badly stem split. These stems were cut out. Not much bloom. Newly planted 'Springwood White' and 'Kramer's Rote' showed no damage. Some dried-out tips.

Other Notes: Piles of crushed stones on heather beds. Several labels broken or missing. Tully thinks this is due to use of snow throwers to clear paths. Little or no sign of frost heaving on new plantings. Ground surface muddy, ground still frozen underneath. Winter-coloring heathers looked good with strong red tints.

~Donald Mackay

**Annual Conference of The Heather Society**

**11<sup>th</sup> - 14<sup>th</sup> September 2009**

**Surrey, England**

**Contact person: Susie Kay, Event Organizer at [susick@gofree.indigo.ie](mailto:susick@gofree.indigo.ie)**

**Register by 1<sup>st</sup> July, 2009**

## NORTH CAROLINA VISIT

Jane and I met Art and Judy Pilch for the second time in our heather lives in Victoria, British Columbia at the Third International Heather Conference. We found them to be delightful and knowledgeable heather folks. I don't usually think of people as folks unless they live in a rural environment. When the Pilches described themselves as living in the mountains of western North Carolina, they became folks to me. I was first struck by their lack of a southern accent. I was impressed with their knowledge of heath and heather, and their missionary zeal in talking about the plants. I soon learned why. They sold plants out their back door and also at shows, large and small, in a several-hundred-mile radius "mostly north" as Art put it.

We had met before, in Maine at the 1999 NEHS Annual Conference. We remember Maine. They remember Maine. We just didn't remember each other. So much for first impressions.

When I told Art we were converting a fallen-down garage into a propagation shed, he asked how we planned to keep the cuttings warm in winter. I told him we were letting our rooted cuttings go dormant. (This was the method we learned from Waquoit Nursery on Cape Cod.) He suggested using heat under the cuttings to promote growth. I hadn't progressed that far on the design stage of the propagation shed, so I listened to him very closely. When he invited us down to see his nursery and propagation methods, I said, "Yes".

You know how difficult it can be to do what you say you will do. You also know if you don't do as you say, it may not be held against you. Flying back from the International Heather Conference in mid-August, I had every intention of making a trip to North Carolina in early October. It would be a great time, with the trees changing colors and cooler days.

It took 6 to 8 phone calls over a 3-month period to finally arrange a firm date, which ended up being well past October. Jane and I decided to combine our visit to the Pilches in Sylva, North Carolina with a visit to her parents in northern Florida. We arrived at the Pilches on Thursday afternoon, January 15<sup>th</sup>.

Art and his wife Judy produce about 2000 *Calluna vulgaris*, *Erica carnea* and *E. x darleyensis* plants a year. Their nursery is tucked away in the mountains of North Carolina. Their home, grandson's home, and nursery are located on the side of a hill. We knew that we had found them when we saw posts topped with beautiful baskets of heather. Before we were out of the car, we were admiring the beautiful winter heather interspersed with other wonderful plants such as conifers, dogwood, genista and holly.

Art and Judy met us with open arms and made us feel very welcome and comfortable. Merlot, our black lab, and Murphy, Art and Judy's cat, quickly developed a respectful relationship.

Art took us on a tour of his nursery. He has two greenhouses separated by an open area for larger plants. His greenhouses are double layered. The area between the two plastic layers is inflated with air via a pump to provide insulation in the winter. Art indicated that this keeps the greenhouse about 10 degrees warmer. Art propagates his heather in a lean-to built into the side of the hill. He uses bottom heat to provide the warmth the cuttings need throughout the winter. Water is supplied by misters.

Art and Judy have had success with many cultivars. That was evident from our tour. Their potted plants are lush. Some of their favorite *Callunas* are 'Highland Rose', 'Lime Glade', 'Gerda', 'Rubrum' and 'Allegretto'.

That evening, after a wonderful meal prepared by Judy, we relaxed in their cozy family room. Art and Judy's

enthusiasm for heather spill over into many other areas. Judy is a wonderfully creative needle-woman. Her needle-point work, dolls and cloth pictures were beautiful. Art is into wood. He built their lovely home and has recently taken up carving. Both have taken classes at the nearby John C. Campbell Folk Art School, which provides instruction in a non-competitive atmosphere.

The next day, Art and Judy took us on a tour of the area. There is so much to do and see in western North Carolina. Unfortunately we were limited to indoor or in-car options as the weather was frigid. We toured the visitor center of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park in Cherokee. We visited an Indian crafts shop which had museum quality baskets, carvings and pottery. Our day ended with an exciting ride around the mountains. Even in winter, the vistas were breath-taking. We returned to their home and enjoyed another of Judy's wonderful dinners. The next morning we headed to Florida.

To those who say, "You can't grow heather in North Carolina." Art says "Oh yes I can!"

Jane and I certainly agree. The Pilches' heather, both in the greenhouse and in their landscape, rivaled any we've seen elsewhere. *-Paul Murphy*

*The humid, subtropical climate of North Carolina, with its very sultry summers, isn't to the liking of heaths and heathers, and the region's clay soils would spell certain death. Art and Judy Pilch have obviously found success growing our favorite plants there and we hope they will share their secrets with us in another newsletter. -Editor*

### NEHS ANNUAL MEETING PLANS ARE SHAPING UP

Plans are almost, but not quite, complete at print time for our chapter's annual membership meeting/conference, to be held in the **Northampton-Deerfield area of western Massachusetts**. The membership meeting is traditionally a mid-September event but this year has been moved back to the last weekend of summer, **August 29 and 30**.

Priscilla Williams of Townsend, Massachusetts, one of our directors, is chairwoman of this event. Bill Dowley and Judy Doyle are helping out during this very busy time for Priscilla's landscape care business (Pumpkin Brook Organic Gardening [www.seedlingspecialist.com](http://www.seedlingspecialist.com)). We are checking out lodging, meals and transportation. Complete information and the registration form will be published in the July issue of *Heather Notes*.

Priscilla has lined up three terrific garden tours for Saturday, August 29: **The New England Wild Flower Society's Nasami Farm and Sanctuary**, the **Smith College Botanic Garden** and a **private garden** belonging to one of her clients. Bill and Vicki Dowley are hosting a breakfast for NEHS members on Sunday, August 30, a little farther north in their Keene, New Hampshire home.

**MARK YOUR CALENDAR**

Right photo-  
Early March

The Chenango,  
New York heather  
bed feeling the love  
from Mary and  
Peter Matwey.  
*Matwey photo*

Below—  
January

The side garden of  
Art and Judy Pilch,  
Sylva, North Carolina.  
*Murphy photo*



**HEATHER NOTES**, all rights reserved, is published quarterly by the Northeast Heather Society (NEHS), a tax-exempt organization and a chapter of the North American Heather Society (NAHS).

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](http://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:

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All material may be edited for clarity and length.

**DEADLINES FOR EACH ISSUE:**

March 20—June 20—September 20—December 20

