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WELCOME, NEW MEMBER!

Suzanne Pindyck

Quechee, Vermont

**AUGUST 29-30**

**Annual Membership Conference  
of the North American Heather Society (NAHS)  
Hosted by the Northeast Heather Society chapter**

**Come join us in the beautiful Pioneer Valley and Mo-  
hawk Trail area of Western Massachusetts.**

We will sample the best of the area's gardens, public and private, and have a taste of some of its top-rated cuisine as well. The Connecticut River has given this region wonderful soil along with views of nearby hills and mountains.

On Friday afternoon, we will meet in Conway at the very special garden of artist and garden designer Liz Toffey. Her garden has been a changing composition and inspiration to others since 1994.

Then, travel via scenic back roads to the village of Shelburne Falls for dinner on your own in one of the town's cafes. Stroll the 'Bridge of Flowers', created by volunteers on an abandoned trolley bridge, see the nearby heather garden, and arrive at the local senior center, our center of operations from 4 p.m. to 10:00 p.m. Here will be our registration setup, heather plants for sale, and informal gathering before our featured speaker at 7:30. Liz Toffey, whose gardens we visited earlier, will present a slide show on rock gardening

A chartered bus will take us on Saturday's garden tours. First stop is Nasami Farm in Whatley, the propagation headquarters of the New England Wild Flower Society. Ron Wik, nursery business manager, will provide a guided tour. There will be an opportunity to purchase plants.

Then we travel into the hill town region, to the garden of Eileen Muir in Goshen. Here a box lunch will be provided. This private sanctuary is still a work in progress, but Elaine, a native Scotswoman, is a heather enthusiast who has built gardens on tumbledown stonewalls, around boulders and surrounding a recently dug pond.

Our final stop on the tour will be the Botanic Garden at Smith College, Northampton, including its renowned rock garden and Lyman Conservatory.

Saturday evening we will meet over dinner at an area restaurant.

On Sunday, travel northeast to Keene, New Hampshire, where Bill and Vicki Dowley will host a breakfast and tour of their New England Heather Nursery. Heather plants will be available for purchase.

True enthusiasts will want to continue on to 'The Fells' (John Hay estate) in Newbury, New Hampshire (site of the 2005 annual meeting) to check on progress of the NEHS heather plantings and annual spring pruning sessions, and to see summer color in the rock garden and perennial borders overlooking Lake Sunapee.

**REGISTRATION FORM AND LODGING INFORMATION IS ON PAGE 6**



Heaths & Heathers • Rare Conifers  
Japanese Maples • Perennials  
Unusual Trees & Shrubs  
Alpines & Xeric • Bamboo • Ferns  
Grasses  
Hosta • Bog & Water



### QUACKIN' GRASS NURSERY

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Closed Tuesday and Wednesday

860 779 1732

16 Laurel Hill Road, Brooklyn, CT 06234

[www.QuackinGrassNursery.com](http://www.QuackinGrassNursery.com)

### Featured Plant

#### *Calluna vulgaris* 'Fritz Kircher'

'Fritz Kircher' has long spikes of purplish-pink buds fading to white the base, blooming from August into December. It is a neat, compact plant with mid-green foliage; its fully grown dimensions are 12" high by 16" wide, approximately.

This heather is one of the bud-bloomer group; that is, its flowers never open and are effectively sterile, incapable of normal fertilization from pollinating insects. Thus, the color is retained much longer than normal *Calluna* flowers, which wither soon after they are pollinated and seed starts to develop.

During winter, the buds slowly age to pale silver.

-*Gardening with Hardy Heathers, Small & Wulff*

"It is the result of a deliberate breeding programme by Kurt Kramer, using 'Marleen' as one of the parents. It is named after the Founder of der Gesellschaft der Heidefreunde, the German Heather Society"

-*Handy Guide to Heathers, Small*





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## FROM YOUR PRESIDENT

### SIX GOOD REASONS TO REDESIGN YOUR HEATHER BED

#### Lemonade Out of Lemons

Winter winds, no snow, a mid-May "Hard Freeze" at 26 degrees, a *phytophthora* pathogen in the soil, a 'Hot Mulch' burn on tender new shoots and the realization that all the brown stuff on the heather plant is not going to suddenly turn green.

The cleanup, which is still in progress, is a physical and a learning process. After cutting away the brown and re-burying the salvageable plants in my heather bed, room was found for a few pot-bound dwarf blueberry bushes and some colorful, compact Spirea. During the cleaning up, I found that the shorter *Callunas* fared much better than the tall bushy ones. A planting of *Calluna vulgaris* 'Tib' and a C.v. 'C.W.Nix' on either side of C.v. 'Perestrojka' showed no browning at all. Over half of the 'Perestrojka' had to be removed or buried deeper to hide the damage.

My smug attitude that I knew how to protect my heathers from man or the elements is defunct. Even as I bragged about how the blanket of leaves protected the heathers from winter weather in one of the local public heather beds, the poor plants got zapped by the hard freeze in May and 'Hot Mulch' heaped too close to the tender new growth. Some might ask, "Is all that work worth it? ". The answer is yes. As a home gardener and a volunteer at a public garden I have yet to find any perennial, annual or shrub that provides as much interest in foliage or bloom for the length of time that heather puts on its display. Having taken this hard hit to the heathers, I feel I've paid my dues. I'm ready to put all this trouble behind me and look forward to the NAHS and NEHS Annual Heather Conference. Great events are planned and I encourage everyone to come and join us in Western Massachusetts. See you there.

-Mary

### DON'T BE PRUNED! WE WOULD MISS YOU!

Check the expiration date on the address page of this newsletter.

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

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## NURSERYMEN'S ADVICE

by Donald A.M. Mackay

In preparing for the enlarged and hopefully improved edition of the NEHS Planting Guide I have encountered two Rod Serling Twilight zones where facts become fuzzy and opinions ambiguous. By becoming belatedly conscious of the excellent advice usually proffered by those who grow heathers, I now read the container labels with almost as much care as those who anguish over food labels with their milligrams of trans fats and lists of nutritional supplements.

However, there were times when weather conditions led me to think I had no time or need to read heather planting advice on container labels, but now I am less sure.

I have known about Environmentals, a nursery situated in Gulchogue at the extreme tip of Long Island, for many years. I knew Jim Cross and helped arrange an NEHS Annual Meeting at his nursery many years ago, where they were growing heathers at a time when they were not well known, and many cultivars were available only at specialist nurseries. I have always had a high regard for Environmentals' products and have no hesitation in reprinting their label for *Calluna vulgaris* 'Gold Knight'. Thus:

**"C.v. 'Gold Knight' - a sport of 'Silver Knight', downy gold foliage set against lavender flowers Aug-Sept. upright form. 16"x20"**

The front of the label has specific information on "Plants Cultural Preferences":

"Best in an open, sunny position. Requires acid soil that is moisture retentive but very well drained. A sandy loam with plenty of added peat is ideal. Lighten heavy clay soils adding generous amounts of sand; acidify limey soils by adding plenty of peat. In all soils the addition of gypsum is beneficial. *Calluna* are vulnerable to desiccation from winter winds and low angle of the winter sun, northern/western exposures should be avoided. Southern/eastern exposures are best. Pruning annually (early March) will keep plants evenly shaped, and encourages them to flower profusely."

Please note the advice for 'generous amounts of sand' to lighten clay soils. And that "a sandy loam with plenty of added peat is ideal". The back of the label, though printed presumably for plants besides heathers, is also worthy of close reading: "See front of label for plant's cultural preferences. Select and prepare planting site accordingly, amending top soil with peat, gypsum, lime, or phosphate. Dig hole much larger than container. Bottom soil must be broken up to ensure proper drainage. Remove plant from container, using a garden claw, partially loosen roots and soil. This breaks the container habit and plant will establish more quickly. Set plant in hole. Top of root system should be just at or slightly above ground level. Do not plant too deeply. Backfill with amended soil. Firm soil gently around plant with hands and form a small mounded basin to retain water. Water should be applied as soon as possible. Apply water slowly for at least 2 hrs (approx. 1"), thoroughly soaking soil to settle and remove air pockets. Best done with slow running hose or oscillating sprinkler (automatic irrigation is not recommended for this first watering). After watering, complete planting bed with 2-3" of mulch. Until planting is well established, water must be continued regularly in growing season: approximately 2x per week for 1 hr per watering for 2 growing seasons."

Note advice "top of root system should be just at or slightly above ground level", which suggests the surface of the soil in the pot should be significantly above ground level. Other nurseries have suggested the root ball should be set at 1 or 2" above ground level, a practice I have never followed if only because I fear my new heathers planted in fall will end up at least 2" above ground level after the frost has left the ground in spring. I think frost heaving is the major cause of fall planting failures, but that may only reflect my climatic conditions and my generous use of peat, which I fear does or can lead to frost heaving because of its high moisture retention. So if anything, I plant a little low.

Why should a plant care whether it is planted too deep? Root anoxia except in flooded conditions is most unlikely, and in any case the universal recommendation to make a water-retaining soil barrier around the plant creates the same risk of excess moisture - if you can even call that a risk. To me an inch of new soil above the root ball is an insurance policy against desiccation, and while recognizing the theoretical problem of putting soil against a stem previously exposed only to air, we seem to worry less about using a mulch for the same purpose.

The advice on watering practices is also worth noting. Yes, the new heather needs lots of water to establish, but how it's applied could be important to its future success.

I have always wondered at the power of rain to kick up the dirt. I see dirt encrusted labels. I see driveway lights 6" above the ground that are choked with mud. I see dirty flowers on spreading heathers after even one moderate rain. I remember the problem of sparse lower foliage on field-grown heathers at Susan White's Vachon Island, WA nursery that some experts attributed to microbial problems due to kicked-up dirt particles. Some nurseries, I know, use paper collars inside their pots, perhaps to offset the dirt kick-up problem.

My own feeling is that planting high may offset dirt kick-up, particularly if mulch is used to level the space created by the water-retaining barrier. But in that case, why not use mulch in the beginning? Bark mulch is less likely a source of dirt kick-up, and redwood bark from western forests seems to contain anti microbial substances which should also help fight off infection, if that, indeed, is what the recommended purpose of planting high implies.

As before, I call on all members to contribute their dimes' worth (inflation even here) on their experiences in their soil in their climate on these two contentious issues. Should our Regional Guide follow the nurseries that say plant high? Is dirt kick up a problem for you? Should we take the advice of those who say add sand to clay?

Comments from disbarred Master Gardeners are especially welcome, and from anyone who feels the growing advice on nursery labels is fuzzy or ambiguous, or just unsuited for the prevailing conditions in your garden.

## BREWED COFFEE GROUNDS USEFUL IN THE GARDEN

*Previously published in April, 2005 issue*

They are a good soil amendment, high in nitrogen, and improving the soil structure. They look like rich, dark soil so make a very attractive mulch. Used alone, they should be added to a depth of one to two inches. Any deeper and they may compact and inhibit water penetration. They can also be mixed with looser mulch materials, or composted. The grounds are a gourmet treat to earthworms. In the soil or in a compost heap, use the coffee grounds at no more than 25% by volume of the mix.

When the coffee was brewed, almost all of the caffeine and acids were removed, but enough acids remain to benefit heather and other acid-loving plants.

In an effort to lessen the load in landfills, many municipalities will offer their spent grounds free in large quantities to gardeners.

**Never pour liquid coffee around plants. The caffeine and acid concentrations can be quite harmful.**

However, coffee poured directly onto slugs and snails is said to be very effective in controlling these pests.\*

\*They become jittery and run away.

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## CLEANUP TIP

I came up with a good idea this year to share. I get leaves stuck in my heather over the winter. I usually pull these out by hand but it takes me hours. Also, it's a problem cleaning up all the debris after I do my light spring pruning (with this tiny 6" Black and Decker electric trimmer).

This year I had the idea to use my shop vac with the large bore hose attachment. It made the leaf and pruning clean-up a snap. I even used it on plants in full bloom and no blossoms were pulled off!

Best regards, Richard

*Richard Norris lives and gardens in Florence, Massachusetts*

## LONGWOOD GARDEN HEATHER TRIAL BED

I recently contacted Barrett Wilson, the Research Assistant at Longwood Gardens in Pennsylvania, to find out how the 40 heaths and heathers they planted last spring were doing. Barrett had covered the heathers with pine straw for winter protection but due to the rather open and windy location most of it blew off over the winter. In April he stated that many of the plants looked quite brown (as did mine at that time) and had suffered some desiccation. He trimmed into the live wood just below last year's flowers and felt they were coming around.

Barrett will be monitoring the trial bed and keep us informed as to how they're doing. I hope to get some pictures of the plants later in the summer.

-Pat Hoffman, New Jersey

Jane and Paul Murphy's website is up and running:  
[www.hickoryhillheathandheather.com](http://www.hickoryhillheathandheather.com)

## DEAR PLANT DOCTOR

Here's one for you and all your resources. The last throes of winter really did a job on the heathers in this area of Central NY (of course the lack of snow didn't help either).

Anyway, what we have going into June are heathers that are 50% to 70% brown sticks, but all new growth is looking healthy. The new growth is generally around the lower edges of the plants and definitely on the sides that were protected by other plants. Before I go trimming these heathers into the most lopsided plants you've ever seen can someone advise me on the best procedure to salvage what is left. I've grown attached to these plants and would hate to yank them out. But then again, I'm open to all suggestions.

-Mary

*I'm not a doctor, but I will play one in this drama.*

*Mary, the method of filling the dead stick area with a loose mulch seems the best solution. New growth may or may not come up through the mulch eventually, but even if it does not, the mulch will make the center of the plant more attractive and it won't be necessary to shudder and avert one's eyes when viewing the scene.*

*The mulched center will be slightly mounded, thus creating the effect of several smaller plants around the perimeter, which will develop eventually into nicely shaped plants.*

*I hope this helps. Please let us know if you use this or any other method.*

-Judy

## HEATH AND HEATHER DESCRIPTIONS 101:A REVIEW

### *Erica ciliaris*

"An evergreen shrub from south and south-west England, north-west France, western Ireland, Portugal, north-west Spain and north-west Africa, occurring naturally in moist and sunny positions. It has ovate leaves, grey-green or dark green above, white beneath, usually glandular and borne in whorls of 3. The long racemes of flowers from mid-summer to mid-autumn are usually lilac pink, each flower being sharply contracted at the mouth. It prefers moist, acid, sunny positions and is suitable for hardiness zone 7 with protection."

-The Heather Society's Handy Guide to Heathers by David & Anne Small, 1998-99 edition; also online:  
[www.users.zotnet.co.uk/heather](http://www.users.zotnet.co.uk/heather)

*E. ciliaris* is out of the question for most of New England, except maybe parts of Cape Cod that flirt with zone 7 temperature averages. It's addressed here because it follows last issue's *Erica carnea* alphabetically. And who knows...you may have a villa on the Mediterranean.

Next issue: *Erica cinerea*.

**FRIDAY EVENINGSPEAKER**

Liz Toffey is an artist (watercolors, paste paper, pastels, prints, drawings). She is also a garden designer, lecturer and writer.

Please visit her website and you will see why we are looking forward to visiting her gardens and, later, hearing her presentation on rock gardening.

[www.liztoffey.com](http://www.liztoffey.com)

**BRIDGE OF FLOWERS**

**SHELBURNE FALLS, MASSACHUSETTS**

Conference attendees won't want to miss the famous Bridge of Flowers, the only one of its kind in the world. The 400' span over the Deerfield River was once a trolley bridge. In 1929 funds were raised to transform it into its present incarnation, attracting 24,000 visitors last year. It is maintained entirely by donations and volunteers of the local women's club.

**NASAMI FARM AND SANCTUARY**

This 75 acre farm in Whately, Massachusetts is the native plant nursery of the New England Wildflower Society.

**SMITH BOTANIC GARDEN**

The Smith Botanic Garden is an arboretum, with over 6600 different kinds of living plants, 10,000 total.

[www.smith.edu/garden](http://www.smith.edu/garden)

Our Saturday garden tour will begin at 10:00 a.m. and wind up at 5:00 p.m.

We will travel on a comfortable coach, not a schoolbus.

The area is home to 5 colleges and several small towns with many points of interest.

**B AND B AND HOTEL DATA**

**Bird's Nest Bed & Breakfast**

2 Charlemont Road, Buckland, MA

[www.birdsnestbnb.com](http://www.birdsnestbnb.com)

(413) 625 9523

4.4 miles west of Shelburne Falls

**Dancing Bear Guest House**

22 Mechanic Street, Shelburne Falls, MA

[www.dancingbearguesthouse.com](http://www.dancingbearguesthouse.com)

(413) 625 9281

3 rooms available, which have been reserved for NEHS/NAHS conference attendees for a short time. \$109 per room.

**Kenburn Orchards Bed & Breakfast**

1394 Mohawk Trail, Shelburne Falls, MA

[www.kenburnorchards.com](http://www.kenburnorchards.com)

877-536 2876

7 miles east of Shelburne Falls

**Super 8 Motel**

21 Colrain Road, Greenfield, MA 01301

[www.super8greenfield.com](http://www.super8greenfield.com)

(413) 774 5578

9 miles east of Shelburne Falls Senior Center

A block of 10 rooms has been reserved for NEHS/NAHS members at the reduced rate of \$88 (plus tax) and will be held at that rate until July 24.

**West Winds Inn**

151 Smead Hill Road, Greenfield, MA 01301

[www.westwindsinn.com](http://www.westwindsinn.com)

(413) 774 4025

approx. 10 miles northeast of Shelburne Falls Senior Center  
3 rooms available \$119-\$159

Be sure to mention you are with the Northeast Heather Society when you call for reservations at any of these places.

**CONFERENCE REGISTRATION FORM**

Please note: If at all possible, send an early indication of your intention to attend/not attend the conference. Your planning committee will be grateful.

Name(s) \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

e-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

Please check your day of arrival: Friday \_\_\_\_\_ Saturday \_\_\_\_\_

Please circle each event you will attend: FEE

Friday 1:00 p.m. Garden Tour \_\_\_\_\_ \$10 \_\_\_\_\_

Friday 7:30 p.m. Liz Toffey lecture \_\_\_\_\_ \$10 \_\_\_\_\_

Saturday 10:00-5:00 pm.-Garden tours & lunch \_\_\_\_\_ \$45 \_\_\_\_\_

Saturday 6:00 p.m.-Dinner (tax and tip included) \_\_\_\_\_ \$50 \_\_\_\_\_

Sunday breakfast with the Dowleys, Keene, New Hampshire \_\_\_\_\_ \$5 \_\_\_\_\_

# of Attendees \_\_\_\_\_ x event cost \_\_\_\_\_ = Total payment enclosed \_\_\_\_\_ \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Send completed form and payment (check or money order payable to NEHS) to:  
Priscilla Williams, 35 Turner Road, Townsend, MA 01469.

Contact: Tel. 978 597 3005

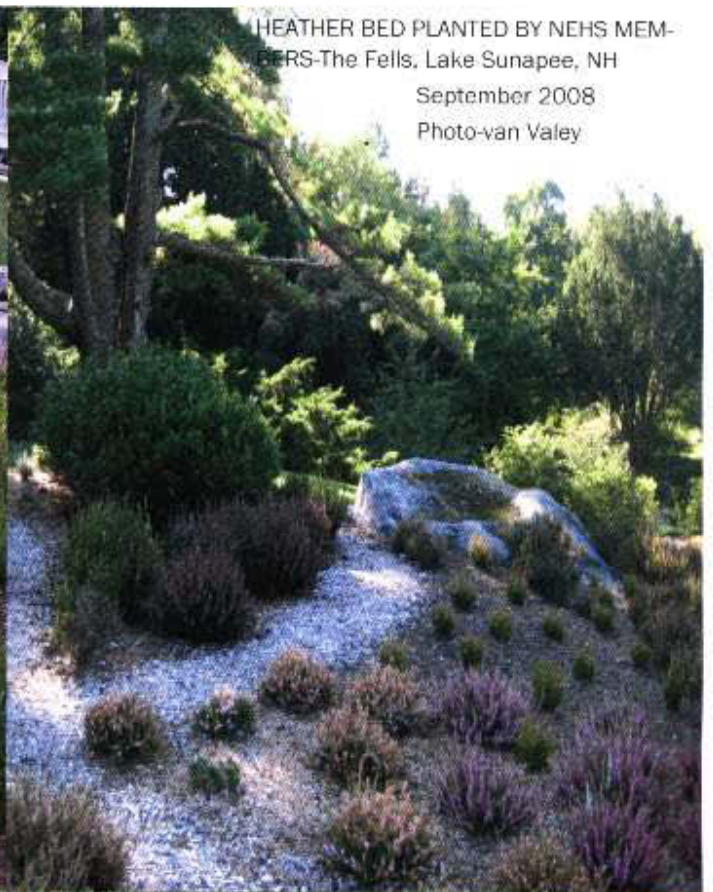
E-mail: [phw@seedlingspecialist.com](mailto:phw@seedlingspecialist.com)

**REGISTRATION DEADLINE: AUGUST 7**



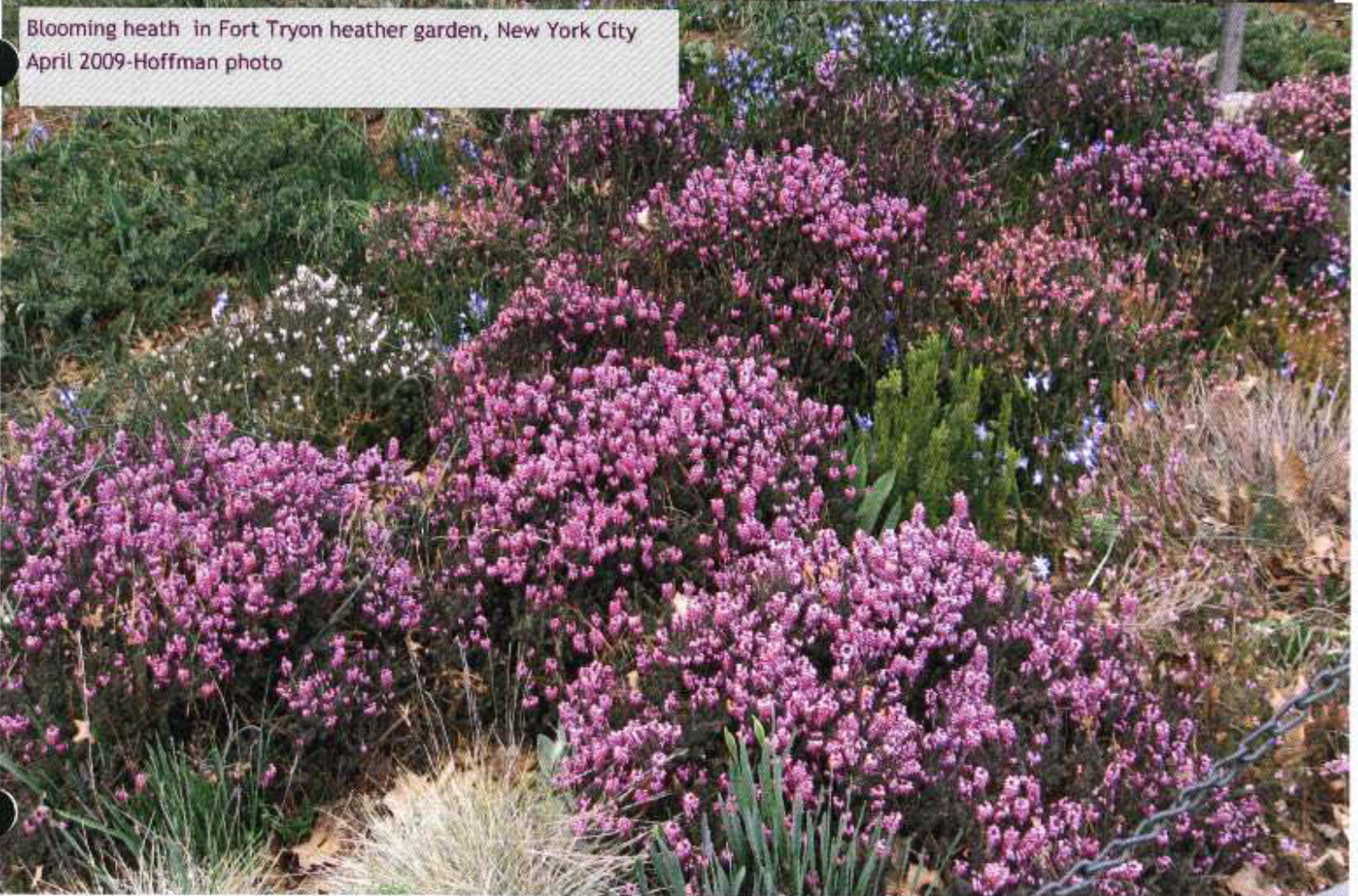


Bill and Vicki Dowley's Heather Garden  
Keene, New Hampshire



HEATHER BED PLANTED BY NEHS MEMBERS-The Fells, Lake Sunapee, NH  
September 2008  
Photo-van Valey

Blooming heath in Fort Tryon heather garden, New York City  
April 2009-Hoffman 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:**

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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

