



QUESTION: Why have my grey heather, *C. v. 'Silver Knight'*, turned brown? The leaves are still supple, but are grey at the tips only.

ANSWER: **Your Guess is as Good as Mine**

by Donald Mackay

In This Issue

Your Guess is As Good As Mine	pg 1
Calendar	pg 1
I Have Finally Seen	pg 2
A Heather Lawn in Process	pg 2
Officers/Directors Listing	pg 3
From the President	pg 5
Important Reminder	pg 5
NAHS Conference	pg 5
'Harry's Grace'	pg 6
Little Siberia	pg 6
Notice	pg 6
Photo Page	pg 7
About Heather Notes	pg 8
Order Form	Insert

2012 CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Heather Trimming

March 31—Lasdon Park

April 14—Fort Tryon (Board Mtg)

April 28—Heritage Museum & Gardens

May 5—The Fells (Board Mtg)

August 8—12 NAHS Conf

The title is the easiest evasive answer to why a few of Mary Matwey's gray-foliaged callunas developed non-brittle brown foliage on stems on one side of the plants. Actually, it is not, since I have spent interminable time trying to find an answer. However, there may not be an answer meaning that your unrefined guess is as likely to be right as my most carefully constructed one. One is not so much right in picking the winning lottery number as just plain lucky.

This philosophical self-flagellation is the result of trying to determine why heather leaves should suddenly lose their green color leaving a brown stem with a little green tuft of foliage on top. The potential for loss of all leaves leaving bare stems is obviously there, with the ominous potential in the background for eventual loss of all stems and death of the plant. However, *induviae*, persistent withered leaves, are usual on some plants. Like beech and elm.

It is tempting to think the cause lies in a plant disease caused by a microbial infection, probably a fungal more than a bacterial one since perhaps three-quarters of plant diseases are fungally caused. But a plant - even our nearly impregnable heathers - can suffer from other causes. Among them are stresses caused by unsuitable soil, unsuitable location, unsuitable weather and unsuitable expectations. But while soil and location can set the stage, it is often the vagaries of weather that can bring the sudden change of condition that we see and attribute to disease, though the disease, even if there, may or may not be causal or just incidental.

There are hundreds of microbial agents in your garden waiting for the opportunity to infect your plants. As with humans, the healthier your plant the less likely it will succumb to attack, but if stressed by unsuitable location (too much dampness, too little air circulation) or poor nutrition, or insect damage or mechanical damage (due to ice or snow or wind-blown sand or even rough handling, any of which can provide the entry point for disease) the plant will suffer. On top of all these possibilities is the obvious one that the plant shed its leaves for its own good reasons, perhaps to conserve moisture, or to balance root and leaf resources, or just to get rid of leaves that have lost their functionality due to disease, drought or cold weather. The last two are unlikely candidates for causing leaf drop in early fall after a very hot and rather wet summer, so it is reasonable to suspect some disease vector is at present. Plants that lose some of their root function due to *Phytophthora* root rot are likely to lose leaves even though the attack is on the roots and not on the leaves directly.

Leaves that turn brown and persist may reflect a different condition for leaves that turn brown, become brittle and drop off. Although I expect

Continued on page 4

I Have Finally Seen a Heather Lawn

I have finally seen a heather lawn. At first glance it looked like tufts of moss or Sedum sprinkled through the blades of grass and mouse eared Plantain. The amazing thing about this very short heather is that it didn't naturalize from seed from the surrounding heather satellite beds but was purposefully planted as cuttings. The names of the cuttings have long been forgotten and since the weekly or monthly mowings keep them from achieving nature's gift of bloom, they are destined to remain anonymous forever. The area between two beds was literally covered with these tiny plants and since heather does not have stoloniferous roots it was clear to see that the owner of this wonderful heather lawn has spent a lot of time, spade in hand, planting cuttings. He relayed to me that the origins of these rooted cuttings are as varied as all the countries he has visited in Europe as well as the mountain ranges and gardens he has trekked through here in the states. Because of my total bewilderment to find so many more patches of miniature heather plants he demonstrated the procedure of planting cuttings in the lawn. His selection was a yellow foliated heather whose name is unimportant and I am sure if the cuttings take he will be able to point to that little patch of yellow and say "See, I told you so". If you've ever been disappointed in the percentage of rooted cuttings you have so laboriously cared for under lights with bottom heat, this may be the stress free solution. Just remember to start with green foliage cuttings so that your "lawn police officer" does not try to eradicate the yellow patch in the lawn.



Heather Lawn in Process by Donald Mackay

One good thing about this time of year is that the grass stops growing - or at least slows - and changes color. Zoysia grass stops early and is well on the way to a straw-colored yellow, but other grasses in Vermont (I hesitate to suggest they are lawn grasses even if they surround the house) also turn to a pale straw color in the better drained areas. The hollows that hold the rain puddles tend to stay green to illustrate what peasants have known since medieval times, namely that grass in wet areas stays green over winter. In England this was called foggage, with some areas in low-lying fields deliberately flooded to provide animal fodder for at least part of the winter.

To be complete, foggage or fog has different meanings in different parts of the UK. Sometimes it is old dried grass, sometimes it is the rank grass of wet areas, sometimes it is the grass that grows after the first haying. In this sense foggage and aftermath, the second reaping, are exact synonyms, though foggage lacks the ominous tones of aftermath.

As applied to Foggy Bottom in Washington, DC, it could mean obscured by fog or the persistent condition of fog. But my fog disperses to reveal patches of brown clearly visible among the yellowish tones of the winter lawn, with the occasional patch of green for another color contrast.

These brownish patches turn out to be either patches of moss (another meaning of foggage, incidentally) or patches of calluna heather lying flush in the grass. In Norway I've seen these flush patches on forest roads, and in Scotland on some sheep walks, but in neither case did transplants keep their dwarf size. They are dwarfed but not dwarfs. So is this case with my brown patches in the lawn. They are dwarfed by lawn mowers where lawn is defined as anything that survives under attack by mowers.

Gill-over-the-Ground (*Glechoma hederacea*) and Ladies Thumb (*Polygonum persicaria*) can also grow as patches among the grasses, but in not so obvious a manner as the heather. How did the heather get there? As seedlings is one answer, since seedlings can often be found in the mowed areas close to the heathers. In my *garden* I find seedlings either in the bed itself at the drip line of established

Continued on page 3

plants, or more commonly in the damp, shaded gutters between bed and lawn. On close examination the patches in the lawn turn out to be mosses in the shady areas, and heather in the open sunnier places, but that could be the consequence of moss displacing heather in the shady parts. Certainly I find it much easier to grow heather in grass than in mass in moss, in spite of the expected benefit of high soil acidity associated with mosses.

As some of you know, I tend to be frugal with heathers, and find it less painful to use heather trimmings than throw them away or leave them among the plants. One way is to use them as cuttings in a rooting medium, but too many die from my neglect or from too much sun or not enough water. I prefer nature to take over these tasks and find the lawn grasses serve very well as shade providers and condensers of morning dew. A slit cut in the grass with a sharp spade serves very well to hold a number of clippings, a second slit closes the first slit, to anchor the clippings against the tug of worms, and opens another opportunity to cram another bunch of clippings into the ground. Eventually one gets tired of this and loses count. Luckily once the count is lost so is the angst of knowing how poor the survival rate is likely to be. Stamp on the cuts in the ground to firm things up and walk away. One, two, maybe three years later you can then be pleasantly surprised to find brown patches growing up in your winter lawn. If they are not patches of moss they may be heather showing that, though slow to grow, they can outmuscle the grasses. Occasional mowing is all the help they need.

NEHS OFFICERS & DIRECTORS, 2012				
President/ Content Editor	Mary Matwey	7 Heights Court Binghamton, NY 13905	(607) 723 1418	mmatwey@stny.rr.com
Vice-President	Donald Mackay	135 Deerfield Lane Pleasantville, NY 10570	(914) 769 6553	dammackay@gmail.com
Treasurer/ Corres Sec.	Peter Matwey	7 Heights Court Binghamton, NY 13905	(607) 723 1418	pmatwey@stny.rr.com
Recording Secretary	Elaine Miller	135 Deerfield Lane Pleasantville, NY 10570	(914) 769 6553	dammackay@gmail.com
Director Emeritus	Harry Bowen	18 Chase Road, Apt. A Falmouth, MA 02540	(508) 548 3113	JPNutilus@aol.com
Director	Pat Hoffman	PO Box 305 Swedesboro, NJ 08085	(856) 467 4711	njgardener15@hotmail.com
Director	Bill Dowley	28 Hurricane Road Keene, NH 03431	(603) 355 8801	wdowley@ne.rr.com
Director	Ellen Holland	69 Hope Corson Rd Seaville, NJ 08230	(609) 390 9143	ehheather@hotmail.com
Director	Vivagean Merz	55 Upland Drive Falmouth, MA 02540	(508) 548 3282	vivagean@comcast.net
Director	Paul Murphy	2473 Hickory Hill Road Oxford, PA 19363	(302) 559 6052	murphy613@zoominternet.net
Director	Alice Schaefer	27 Waverly Avenue Newton, MA 02458	(617) 965 0546	puppetiris@aol.com
Director	Priscilla Williams	35 Turner Road Townsend, MA 01469	(978) 597 3005	phw@seedlingspecialist.com
Director	Suzanne Barnes	9 Giles St. Binghamton, NY 13905	(607) 770 9414	scbee9@aol.com
Director	Bunny van Valey	108 Mossman Road Sudbury, MA 01776	(978) 443 6454	bhvv@msn.com
Director/ Publishing Editor	Jane Murphy	2473 Hickory Hill Road Oxford, PA 19363	(610) 883 2171	murphy1213@zoominternet.net

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

that brown leaves will eventually dehiscence (the fancy word for fall off), I well recall the futile wait for the dark brown interior foliage of many yellow-foliaged callunas to dry and remove itself from distracting our enjoyment of yellow foliage. This discolored foliage was always interior to the plant, the outside being little or not affected.

When leaves of a plant are affected, the condition is usually called a blight. Some pest control manuals describe blight as leaf loss, but the term has been broadened to cover many kinds of plant damage. Another common cause of leaf loss is attributed to mildew, which can be powdery, downy, gray or some other color depending on the organism producing the symptoms. But once again the mildew can be subsequent to insect attack allowing the fungus easy entry and growth on plant exudates to produce the visible mycelial webs we call mildew, which can collapse to reveal the brown remains of the leaf.

It is worth noting that Mary's affected plants were the hairy-leaved ones that give a gray or silvery look to heather foliage. Beijerinck in his monograph on calluna tried hard to subdivide *Calluna vulgaris* into different species, but the only division he found some evidence for was to put the hairy leaved callunas into a sub-species he called ?? (??). If this leaf loss is indeed confined to that foliage type there may be a genetic basis for what appears to be susceptibility to a disease causing loss of leaf function, but Mary says no other silver/gray heather was affected.

When you refer to heather texts, even the latest by Small and Wulff, you find some but not all of the symptoms reported by Mary. The nearest is a description of a fungal blight caused by *Botrytis cinerea* characterized "as if a blow torch had been applied to the tips." In Mary's case it is the stem leaves that have turned brown; it is the tops that are showing new growth. Small wrote an excellent article (HN #78, Spring '97) which points to *Rhizoctonia* as causing leaf loss on lower growth of heathers, but the brown discoloration it causes can affect all stems of stressed plants in humid conditions. With *Rhizoctonia* the dead foliage harbors the fungus and can cause further infection. Remove the plant at least to a remote location if *Rhizoctonia* is suspected.

Some years ago sudden leaf loss in heathers growing close to the car park at Mendocino Botanical Garden was tentatively attributed to car exhaust. But samples sent out to the California State Extension Service came back with the finding that *Pestalotia* was the only fungus that could be outgrown. Little attention was paid, the finding being tentative and *Pestalotia* then unknown as a heather pest.

Since then there have been sporadic reports of a fungus called *Pestalotiopsis*, a name that means only "resembling *Pestalotia*." However, more recently *Pestalotiopsis* was definitely identified by a Scottish laboratory as being a cause of losses experienced by UK heather nurseries. The fear that this fungus was spreading through the distribution system was expressed, the problem arising from the accelerated growth used for bringing cuttings to a saleable size through use of plastic tunnels.

Following this latest finding through the aid of the Wikipedia was only moderately rewarding, but I got the impression that *Pestalotia* and *Pestalotiopsis* were, in fact, the same fungus, the suggestion that both names revert to honoring Pestalozzi being made. The Wikipedia is very helpful, but not authoritative, but I feel it is on the right track. *Pestalotia* (*Pestalotiopsis*) has not made it into the heather texts, but maybe it should from now on.

In order to finish on a positive note, let me recount the story when Mary took her diseased plant to the doctor. "Don't worry, Mary. I know exactly what the problem is." "Yes?" said Mary breathlessly. "Yes," said the doctor. "It's exactly the same as last time."

References

- Mackay, Donald. 1994. Decussate Leaves. *HN* 31(4) 27-8.
 Small, David. 1997. Fungal Diseases of Heathers. *HN* 20(2) 9-12
 Small, D. and E.M.T. Wulff. 2008. **Gardening with Hardy Heathers**. Portland, OR. Timber Press

Photos in this issue, courtesy of Donald Mackay and NEHS Photo Library

From the President: www.northeastheathersociety.org

The Northeast Heather Society officially has a website! If you have a computer, add this web address to your Favorites. If you don't have a computer perhaps a friend or family member would be happy to show this site to you. Many thanks to my friend who designed the site and graciously accepted my requests, changes and additions without complaint. Thanks also goes to those board members who viewed the preliminary site and made comments and suggestions. Never is any new venture accomplished single handedly so for all those I have not mentioned, Thank You. With that out of the way, here is a list of the topics you will find on the NEHS website:

About Us	Membership
NEHS Supported Heather Gardens	Calendar
Regional Heather Growing Guide	Members Only
Contacts	

Membership Forms and Order Forms, where appropriate, are available for printing and on the Contacts page a click on a name will allow you to send an email. On the **Members Only** page the *User name* is **MembersONLY** and the *Password* is **Heather1Bits** . You can even check the Remember my password box and you won't have to type this information in the next time you visit the website and go to the **Members Only** page. The hope is that any one using a "Search Engine" like Goggle etc to find information about Heather, will be directed to our website. ENJOY !

IMPORTANT REMINDER

No one knows what the winter will bring. Will we have enough snow cover to protect the heather with seasonal temperatures, mild breezes and sufficient moisture? Chances are that won't be the case. Fortunately if you have purchased "**A Regional Heather Growing Guide**" you have at your fingertips numerous suggestions on winter protection compiled from the shared experiences of members like yourself. When spring rolls around you'll be armed with the best recommendations on trimming techniques or soil renovation and amendments. This is a handy booklet, well worth the price of \$7.95 which includes S&H.

Spread the word about this handy little Heather Growing Guide to your favorite nursery. Wholesale prices are available to them by contacting Bill Dowley at the address on the enclosed order form.

NAHS Conference - Summer 2012

The current issue of the Cascade Heather Society Newsletter, besides containing a very interesting record of Karla Lortz's travels to see the heaths of South Africa, contains the preliminary details of the 2012 NAHS Conference and tour which will be hosted by the CHS Chapter.

The tour and conference is tentatively scheduled for Aug 8-12 (or the week following if a change is necessary). Part of the tour will be in Canada in order to visit the famous David Wilson Nursery in Chilliwack, BC and the equally famous Minter Gardens, designed and constructed with the help of David Wilson's father. Visits in the US include those to the Washington State Experiment Station, Lloyd Eighme's garden, and the Bellevue Botanic Garden in Seattle. Several gardens and nurseries between Olympia and Shelton will be visited, as well as Karla's nursery, Heaths & Heathers. Picnic lunches, barbecues and a boat ride on Puget sound are also being considered.

It sounds great, and I can vouch from personal experience that it will be great.

Plan a summer holiday around these dates before the airlines take, reduce or cancel your airline miles altogether in the name of economic necessity. The heathers of the Pacific Northwest coast are simply marvelous and the famed hospitality you'll find there is another compelling reason to go. You won't regret it. Guaranteed. Visitors will be picked up at airports, so car rentals are unnecessary, or can be delayed until the end of the conference. More information will be available at:

www.heathsandheathers.com/NAHS/NAHSConvention.htm

October 20, 2011... *Calluna vulgaris* 'Harry's Grace' Damaged by Storm

by Donald Mackay

'Harry's Grace', the cultivar I have been keeping such close watch over, suffered severe storm damage about two weeks ago. The week before Irene soaked much of New England we had a wind microburst in Westchester that took down seven of my trees and several of my neighbor's.

Up to this point all my heathers had survived handsomely, but the wheels of the cherry picker left deep ruts in my lawn and a flattened patch of heather where the equipment had to squeeze between two beds. This is where 'Harry's Grace' and some of its neighbors got their ancillary storm damage. The stems were flattened, some half broken, but the main damage was having the bark rubbed or split off the stems. I left things alone in hopes they'd get better, but they got worse and I finally cut out all the browned foliage. As of now the plant bears no resemblance at all to the 'Harry's Grace' I had known, but at least it is alive and if it does manage to revive, perhaps it needs a new name. How about 'Irrepressible Grace' or 'Amazing Grace' or 'Saving Grace'?

December 2, 2011.....A Period of Grace by Donald Mackay

Per my October report (above), my attempt to develop a Performance Report on *Calluna vulgaris* 'Harry's Grace', a plant I was observing under northern Westchester conditions, has been thwarted. Personally, I was not all that unhappy to lose this plant, after seeing that the plant was more notable for what it didn't do instead of what a new cultivar was supposed to do in order to justify its existence. Floridity was certainly not its strong point and it was hard to give it a definite color or classify it as a new bud bloomer (as some suggested) or merely as a very late and erratic bloomer. Other observers were giving it such varied marks that it seemed not unlikely that different plants had been given out for evaluation. In fact, a second plant I was evaluating in Vermont was already showing another side to me.

We had a freak snow storm in Vermont this past Thanksgiving and all my plants were completely covered under a foot of wet snow. Had the leaves still been around we could have had the same enormous damage to trees that a similar freak storm delivered to southern New England three weeks earlier (Oct. 29). What a mess that was, with lots of heavy branches on the ground, but mostly missing the heathers. That snow persisted, this one rapidly thawed over three days so I had a look around before the real snow had a chance to return.

Nearly all heathers were still growing quite actively and showed no obvious storm damage. I saw an unfamiliar heather in a familiar place and after scraping away a layer of leaves was pleasantly surprised to find what seemed to be a vigorous purplish-flowered bud-bloomer. It turned out to be my second sample of 'Harry's Grace', but what a difference from the first one. Much more vigorous, many more stems, and many more flower buds all around the stem. Not all flowers were open, but those that were showed it was not a bud-bloomer although the swollen buds certainly gave that impression. The color was a strong deep lilac that stood out from the dark green of the neat, well-ordered foliage. It was vastly more floriferous than the Westchester sample, and a vastly improved plant over it. Hard to believe they came as cuttings from the same plant. Amazing Grace, indeed. See photos, page 7.

A Visit to Little Siberia, Granville, VT By Mary Matwey

It might mimic its namesake in cold temperatures and snow covering but the beauty of this garden treasure raises it far above the bleakness of a desolate Siberian landscape.

Vivian Branschofsky welcomed us into her lovely garden on a crisp October morning. Had her plans for a nursery, complete with demonstration gardens materialized, this piece of green-space would have been a tribute to using the lay of the land without the use heavy machinery to fill in the dips and level off the knolls. Each island garden matched its resident plants with the inherent soil and available moisture. Vivian's eye for selecting unique plants that displayed wonderful texture and color of bloom, leaves and fruit from spring through autumn was amazing. And of course the heather bed resided on the highest knoll in the garden assuming its regal position as the loveliest bed of all.

Notice: Since the host of the 2012 NEHS Heather Conference will be attending the 2012 NAHS Heather Conference on the West Coast and vacationing afterwards the NEHS Heather Conference will be held in 2013. However the NEHS Annual Meeting will be conducted electronically using the NEHS website **Members Only** page to conduct business and elect officers as required.

'Harry's Grace' Oct Vermont



2011/10/16

'Harry's Grace' Nov. Vermont



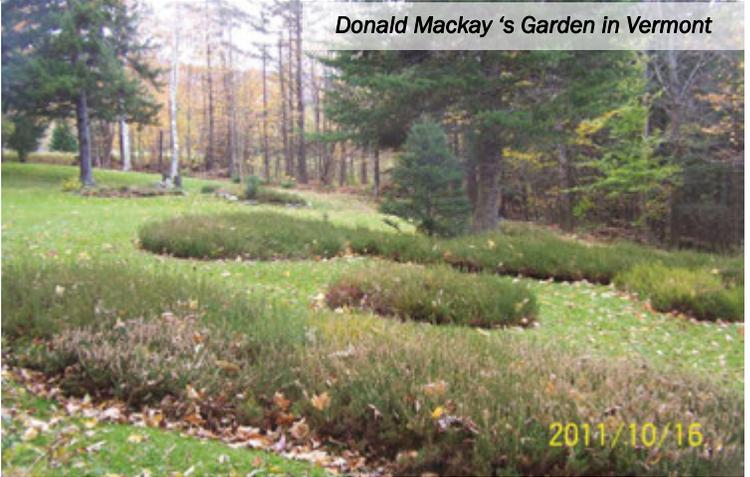
11/28/2011

Winter Collage



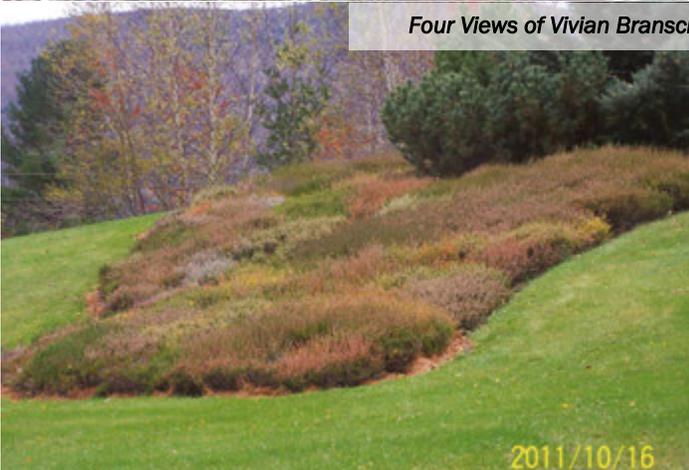
11/28/2011

Donald Mackay 's Garden in Vermont



2011/10/16

Four Views of Vivian Branschofsky's Little Siberia Garden



2011/10/16



2011/10/16



2011/10/16



2011/10/16

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, Phylloce* 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. A family membership permits more than one family member to vote and participate in all NEHS activities for an additional \$5 per year fee above the annual dues. The family membership includes all household members residing at the same address and each member has one vote. Each household will receive only one copy of Heather Notes.

Dues for an Individual: \$15 a year; \$28 for a two year membership; \$40 for a three year membership

Dues for a Family \$20 a year; \$33 for a two year membership; \$45 for a three year membership

Remit payment to: Peter Matwey, Treasurer, 7 Heights Court, Binghamton, NY 13905

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

WEB INFORMATION: NORTHEAST HEATHER SOCIETY website: www.northeastheathersociety.org

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:

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

All material may be edited for clarity and length.

DEADLINES FOR EACH ISSUE:

March 20—June 20—September 20—December 20

