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Your Contributions Are Needed

by Donald Mackay

In the course of my heather career I have started or helped start a number of heather gardens, mainly in the northeast.

Unfortunately, many of them are not being maintained, and nature has taken over several of them without much interference from man. The heathers still grow well, and eventually grow into each other, but I have observed a change in composition over time.

The overall change I see in gardens from Washington, DC up to NYC and Westchester County is that the ericas eventually outgrow the callunas. What I had planted say 30 years ago in Bethesda, MD when I worked there was once a standard mixture of callunas and ericas. Today I see a mass of *Erica x darleyensis*, broad patches of *E. carnea* and isolated clumps of *E. vagans*. Of the many callunas I had planted then I see not even a glimpse. They have been overgrown, smothered, and deprived of light and perhaps nutrients. The soil should not be a factor as azaleas do very well, and *E. x darleyensis* prospers even on road verges.

There is a sort of similar story to be seen in Baltimore where my daughter-in-law grows *Erica x darleyensis* very well, but loses every calluna I plant. The problem here is the sticky clayey soil, which is unsuitable for callunas in spite of amendments, but highly suitable, it seems, for a pair of Labradors to compete at digging holes.

When I go further north to White Plains, NY, a mixed calluna/erica garden I planted at least 25 years ago has gone over entirely to ericas now that the owner has moved away. To be honest, not entirely, as I saw on a recent visit three flowering sprigs of calluna sticking their heads up in a sea of *Erica carnea* against a prominent back drop of *E. vagans*. (Photo page 2)

Even my own garden in northern Westchester County is showing unmistakable signs of a battle being won by ericas. *Erica vagans* is showing up in places far from where I had planted it, and *E. carnea* is spreading at the expense of callunas. In my newer planted gardens where the original spacing is still maintained the calluna does well, but a little inattention in another garden has allowed *E. carnea* to swamp a group of cassiopes so that only remnants remain. In this garden I now have a center of *E. carnea* with a fringe of callunas.

Who else has observed this kind of change? Is it a phenomenon of aging gardens or just - as I fear - a sign of an aging gardener? What can we do to lift the blame from my shoulders and put another load on those of global warming? Yes, even in Vermont where I grow almost exclusively callunas, I see signs that erica winter survival is beginning to approach that of callunas and I can now grow *E. cinerea* there with the expectation that enough of it will survive the winter to put on a good show in summer. Not much proof by itself, but either a sign of warmer weather or perhaps increased erica competition resulting from it.

Enough of my experiences. Tell me about yours.

**NEHS ANNUAL
CONFERENCE AND
GENERAL MEMBERSHIP
MEETING
WILL BE HELD LATE
SUMMER/EARLY FALL
2013 In VERMONT
STAY TUNED
FOR DETAILS
Heather Notes, Jan/
Feb. 2013**

**Featured Plant:
“Two In A Bed”**

I cannot claim to know even a trifle of what is the latest trend in the Horticulture arena but I do know what I like. The newest item I have seen and the most exciting is the combo heather plant and I do mean to say plant not plants. 2 , 3 or 4 cuttings are propagated together and as they grow on, their roots become so intertwined that it is impossible to separate them.

Unfortunately the downside of this combo is that no importance is placed on maintaining or safeguarding the names of the original plants that create this beautiful specimen.

The English, according to David Edge, Forest Edge Nurseries in Dorset, England, call them “2 in a bed”. However David says that when more than 2 different cuttings are combined the “3 in a bed” would be considered too risqué for their clientele so “2 in a bed” applies for all combos.



Ericas Overgrowing Callunas

photo by D. Mackay



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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. Visit www.northeastheathersociety.org for order form

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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

Arise and Bloom! **by Barbara Ohliger Newark, Delaware**

The Highland Games my father took me to as a child at Grandfather Mountain, N.C. and Fair Hill, Md. attuned me to all things Scottish: the tossing of the caber, the bagpipers in full kilt, the sheepdogs rounding up recalcitrant sheep AND the sprigs of heather everyone wore as boutonnières. It made me proud he was a true Scotsman!

Maybe fifteen years ago, I first found pink and white Mediterranean heather for sale in Delaware, horribly pot pound. After some losses, it began to thrive in a totally inhospitable location of mine: full sun, poor soil and super-dry. I guessed those were the only kind that would grow in the United States.

Fast forward to five years ago when Jane Murphy happened to lecture our gardening class on heaths and heathers. She and her husband in retirement had moved nearby to Newark to propagate varieties that do well in our Middle-Atlantic climate. That was the impetus I needed!

My thinking grew clearer! I would visit Jane's heather nursery, see what grew well for her, and as a trial, see how several would do for me, in locations with varying amounts of shade. Many did well; now I began thinking about a proper garden of heather!

In early spring this year, my husband and I used a garden hose to outline proposed boundaries under large shade trees, using an existing path as the longitudinal boundary, roughly encompassing 225 square feet. Then he laboriously removed hundreds of candelabra primroses I had spent years propagating. We prepared the soil. The BEST was returning to Jane's nursery and delighting, picking out interesting textures and colors to juxtapose against each other....it was like ordering food I had never seen in a language I didn't speak!

Jane volunteered to stop by and show me how to prune my existing heathers. I had read the gentleman's idea in the Heather Notes Newsletter to plant pruned heather, so I religiously gathered all my cut trimmings and planted them in my shadiest spot. I realized I wasn't sure how deep to put them, so I tried burying them to varying depths.

Now it is early August in Delaware, we are in our sixth heat wave of the summer. Jane came by again to tally my successes and losses. In one strong sunspot, three *Erica carnea*, 'Golden Starlet' were peppered with die back. I also lost several super-small, dark green *Daboecia*, 'Atropurpurea,' When I counted, I found I had lost 18 of roughly 150 plants. Of my planted cuttings, maybe only 10-15 percent show green needles, but I am hoping that underground root growth might produce new vibrancy in springtime.

I am so happy for the suggestions and recommendations I have found in the NEHS newsletter and hope members will continue to elucidate what is working for them.

I am already savoring years of future pleasure with our new heather garden as well as enjoying visual closeness to my father's memory.

Advice to a Beginning New Jersey Heather Gardener **by Donald Mackay**

You are fortunate to be living in New Jersey, deservedly known as the Market Garden State. And doubly fortunate if you wish to grow heathers and live in or near the sandy acidic soils of the Pine Barrens, endemic home to many ericaceous plants, like the huckleberries and blueberries, besides the non-ericaceous Beach and Golden heathers.

The heathers or heaths (the names are interchangeable in the trade) will not be found in the Pine Barrens, but some of the most floriferous kinds will be found in most nurseries in the state since they grow well and come into bloom in the spring for sale between Valentine's and Mother's Day.

These plants, called the Spring Heaths, are hybrids between the Winter Heaths (*Erica carnea*) and the ten-

Continued on page 5

der Irish or Mediterranean Heaths (*Erica erigena*). This natural hybrid, first found in the Darley Dale Nursery in England, is called *Erica x darleyensis* in Latin and the Darley or Mediterranean Heath in English, usually labeled 'Mediterranean Pink' or 'Mediterranean White'. These plants are certainly hardy in Zone 6 and will grow very well in New Jersey in almost any kind of soil.

As a beginning heather gardener you are well advised to start with Mediterranean Pink and White. They are easy to grow, tolerant of soils, gardening mistakes, and most weather conditions, and make a splendid display in spring. However, you will soon want to see heathers in bloom in the summer, late fall and even early winter, in which case you will find your answers in the calluna heathers and other kinds of hardy ericas like *Erica carnea*, *E. vagans* and *E. cinerea*. All should do well in New Jersey, wherever you are, and most nurseries will carry them.

However, keep a warm spot in your heart and garden for the Mediterranean Heaths. You can hardly find a better way to start growing heathers.

A word of warning. The large supermarkets and Garden Home Stores may also carry similar looking plants to the Darley Heaths, but they are much more tender (though more floriferous) as the result of hybridizing with South African heaths. If the label says *Erica persoluta* or *E. subdivaricata*, be aware the plant is designed as a potted plant for indoor use. Planted outdoors, even in New Jersey, they are sure to expire.

The President's Column Mary Matwey

All good things must come to an end and that includes one of the most rewarding experiences of my life. What is it? Well, it's the 6 years I have spent being the president of the Northeast Heather Society. Donald Mackay, the current Vice President and soon to be President Elect will be taking over the reins of the Northeast Heather Society. A majority of the Board of Directors have responded in favor of the slate of candidates willing to fill the empty positions of Vice President and Recording Secretary. Therefore a ballot requesting you, the general membership, to vote Yes or NO for the candidates is included in this edition of the HN. This method of conducting the Society's business, by mail or electronically, is allowed per the Society's Bylaws. Since circumstances prevented the Society from conducting an in-person annual meeting this year where the officers of the Society would normally be voted on, I urge the general membership to participate in this alternate method of selecting NEHS officers. The mailing address or email address to cast your vote appears on the insert provided.

The Editor and Publisher of the HN, Mary Matwey and Jane Murphy respectfully, have been approved by the Board for another year. I'm sure you will recognize all the names on this year's ballot. Why? Because we have been recycling the same NEHS members between executive positions for many years. The last influx of new faces willing to be active members came on board in 2006 when I became president and brought along with me, my husband Peter who has ably handled the Societies finances for 5 years and Suzanne Barnes who served as Recording Secretary for 5 years. Peter's term is up in 2013 and his use of Microsoft Excel and Access makes handling the finances and membership database for this Society a piece of cake. Anyone interested? The Bylaws of our Society prohibit any officer from serving in any one position longer than 3 consecutive 2 year terms or 6 years. Our Society is no different than most organizations these days that are lacking in young, enthusiastic members willing to assume additional responsibilities on top of their already full plates. So what can we do? This is a serious problem and although Donald Mackay's article, page 1, adds a little bit of humor it also shows the hopelessness of the situation. New Treasurers, Secretaries, Presidents and Vice Presidents and Board of Directors do not bloom and fall from Heather plants. They are nurtured and encouraged by friends who are NEHS members that want to see this Society survive.

I encourage you to renew your efforts to spread heather news to friends and acquaintances in hopes that they will become active members in your Society.

2012 NAHS Conference Report

by Mary Matwey

We had an uneventful plane ride to Seattle but an observation is in order. Unless you are seated at or near the point where the stewardess starts passing out or selling food/condiments /drinks there will probably be none left by the time they reach your seat. My advice; pack food. That said, congratulations to Ella May Wulff, Karla Lortz and their teams for orchestrating a flawless series of events and garden visits. We even had a “McGuiver Moment” when the keys were locked in an empty bus. Thanks to the ingenuity of Gary Schuldt, host of the Pear St. Garden, who miraculously released the hydraulic pressure holding the door closed, the day was saved and the bus driver was spared the embarrassment of having to call the boss.

Our first nursery visit was Qualitree Nursery in Rosedale, BC. where the long trip from Seattle with a border crossing into Canada was quickly forgotten as we viewed acres of heather and huge greenhouses of propagated heather cuttings(photo #1). Who buys all these heathers? According to our hosts the majority of the inventory is sold in Canada with some US sales. We can only hope that the Canadian love of heathers might spread to the northeast giving our Northeast Heather nurseries reason to grow and multiply. This unbelievable first day ended with an outdoor barbeque for our group courtesy of Qualitree Nursery.

A heather tour in Canada would not be complete without stopping at Wilson’s Nursery Ltd. near Chilliwack, BC. What a treat that was to stroll through Ken Wilson’s display gardens where color, texture, and form were magically combined in ways normal people only dream of (photo #2). The featured plant combo pictures were taken at Ken’s nursery. This 2nd day of the conference ended with lunch and a self-guided tour at Minter Gardens, Chilliwack, BC. The terrain of this garden was shaped by a massive mountain rock slide centuries ago. The Minter family have taken advantage of this unique landscape and fashioned compatible gardens around the gurgling brooks, waterfalls and rock outcroppings. The tulips and Rhododendrons bloom had passed but the rose garden woodland flowers and perennial borders were magnificent (photo #3).

The third day of the conference found us back in the US at T&L Nursery, Redmond, WA. Here again we saw acres, 35 plus, of heather and perennials (photo #4) but the best part of this nursery visit was that we were allowed to buy plants. The founder of this nursery came from Europe bringing with him a mindset committed to providing quality and service to the Garden Centers and landscapers of the Pacific Northwest. The next stop at the Chateau Ste Michelle Winery and Tasting Room was a welcomed change from all the horticultural stimuli our senses had been bombarded with the last few days. “It’s a small world” phrase was proven true once more when the gentleman helping us select a wine informed us he was originally from Oswego, NY , one of the coldest and snowiest cities in upstate NY. This day ended with a visit to Bellevue Botanical Garden. This public garden is managed completely by volunteers, from a Board of Directors to the specialized committees that oversee the daily activities of the Society and the gardens. A half mile loop of trails meander through a Perennial Border (photo #5), Rock Garden, Rhododendron Glen, Fuchsia Garden, Eastern Garden and the Herb and Knot Garden plus others that time did not allow us to see. We wearily traveled to The Little Creek Casino Hotel, Shelton, WA to rest up for more non-stop garden visits.

Day four began with a visit to Gary “McGuiver” Shuldt’s Pear St. garden in Olympia which can rightly boast of over 4,000 plants representing about 2,500 unique varieties all on 1/3 of an acre of land. A masterful feat of design that included a collection of 250 Heather. The next stop was the De Goede Bulb Farm in Mossyrock where we toured the bulb sorting and storage facility and then walked into the field area where we were once again awed by the enormity of the growing fields. Our guide explained that the De Goede farm stretched from a hilltop on the right, across the valley to a hilltop on the left encompassing about 500 acres. On 300 of these acres they still grow tulips and Dutch Iris but perennial flowering plants are now their biggest crop. We lunched at Mossyrock Park courtesy of Ken Hutchins whose heather display garden was next on the tour. Ken’s garden was the picture perfect heather tapestry with a stream meandering through the garden (photo #6). His eye for “sports” leading to many new heather introductions sets him apart from many of us however a “vole and mole” problem is the universal equalizer.

The last day of the conference was spent visiting Alber’s Vista hillside garden and the picture (photo #7) does not do justice to the heights we traversed to view John’s heather. It was all downhill from there, referring to altitude, as we traveled to Karla Lortz’s Heath and Heather display garden where we once again fed our habit of purchasing heather. Karla and husband then hosted our group at Jarrell’s Cove Marina to a sumptuous barbecue and boat ride tours of the cove. The day was finished off with a presentation on Karla’s favorite Heathers at the Old Grant Schoolhouse in Pickering. Before the sun set we gathered outside to pose for a farewell picture (photo #8) capturing the smiling faces of new friends and renewed friends. I hope I have done justice in my report for all the hard work that made this conference memorable.

#1



#2



#3



#4



#5



#6



#7



#8



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. 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

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NORTHEAST HEATHER SOCIETY website: www.northeastheathersociety.org

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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

