



## The 2013 Annual Meeting, Waitsfield, VT

By Donald Mackay

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The NEHS Annual Conference was held Aug.16 to 18 under cloudless skies that provided cool evenings and the rationale for crowded conviviality for not quite twenty members and guests who had in many cases travelled long distances to ski country in the northern half of Vermont for the ostensible purpose of observing heather response to spending at least three months each year under 3 to 5 feet of snow.

In the event, however, horticultural interests tended to lose out to the enthusiastic and very competitive efforts of our (unofficial) Society subsections, devoted to Oenological and Gastronomic interests. Members from the Finger Lakes region seemed intent on earning their Sommelier's Badge and were always there when needed with corkscrews and cap lifters. Other attendees were either cabbalistic members of the CIA (Culinary Institute of America, Essex Junction, VT) or fearful of the cacotrophic effects of too much contemplation of heather beds.

Either way, the Wine and Cheese featured on Friday, or the barbecue on Saturday, or the brunch on Sunday afforded large scope for bucolic digestion of the heathery sights that Vermont affords.

The Saturday visit to the heather display garden of the Little Siberia nursery in nearby Granville was obviously the high point of the garden sights, and much time would readily have been spent there talking to Vivian and Fritz Branschovsky about the spectacular result of their gardening efforts had not the failure to meet the legal and financial commitments of a lunch in Waterbury been forcefully presented by some members of our Gastronomic subsection (unofficial).

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Conference attendees at 'Little Siberia'.



Vivian Branchovsky and 'friend'.

## Featured Plant — Update on Harry's Grace by Donald Mackay

After three years of languid growth in Vermont ski country, *Calluna vulgaris* 'Harry's Grace' has suddenly taken off and with 22" of compact spread, is now pushing into its neighbors, viz. 'Valerie Griffiths', 'Tomentosa', 'Alba Elegans', 'Boskoop' and 'Red Haze', all of which are vigorous growers in their own right. The last three nights of severe frost in mid-September have had very little effect, although 'Red Haze' is redder. 'Harry's Grace' is unchanged, and its whitish multi-bracted stems show only the promise of flowers for a Barmecide feast. It is not a bud-bloomer, but a non-bloomer. Yet the overall foliage effect certainly merits a place in the garden.

### Postscript by Mary Matwey

I stood with awe looking down at Donald's heather patch where Harry's Grace grows. The characteristic of this plant to look as though it is going to bloom for several months while other heathers have bloomed and then become senescent makes it a worthy addition to the heather garden. Forget the flowers!



### Post Postscript by Jane Murphy

I hadn't taken a close look at our Harry's Grace for a while, so I out I went to our heather garden with camera in hand. We have one Harry's Grace in our heather garden. It is similar to Donald's plant. Both in size and stem formation; the multi-bracted stems are white.

Next, I walked over to where we keep our potted heather as I knew we have a half dozen Harry's Grace in 4inch pots. On all six plants the multi-bracted stems were no longer whitish but showing strong signs of pink! Along the bottom of a few stems the buds appears to be opening into flowers.

I have no idea why there is such a difference between the potted plants and the one in the ground. The area where we keep our potted heather receives full sun in summer so we cover it with a 50% shade cloth. We just removed the shade cloth the beginning of September. Our heather garden is behind the house and receives afternoon shade year-round.

I'd be interested to hear your thoughts as to why this difference.



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*Welcome Back, Judy*

At the 2013 Annual meeting Judy Doyle, former NEHS President, agreed to serve as a Director on the NEHS Board .

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After lunch most people went to Ben & Jerry's to see why Ben & Jerry's Ice Cream Factory in Waterbury is the State's largest tourist attraction, and to talk to others who had come to Ben & Jerry's for the same unfathomable reason. Subsequently others went to the Cabot Cheese Tasting Center, and to the Green Mountain Coffee Company to taste their products *ab origine*, but others made their way to the Von Trapp Nursery in a vain effort to restore the horticultural balance.

Horticulture also entered into a reprise by the President of a talk given a month earlier in Washington, DC before the Maryland Native Plant Society, a group feared for their propensity to tear limbs from non-believers as readily as Garlic Mustard or Purple Loosestrife from the ground. However, since the MNPS was observing the Year of the Heath, the opportunity was taken to morph from Heath to Heather in hopes that any naturalized heathers that might be in Maryland could be spared the deracinator's tongs.

The conference ended with our meeting to discuss the proposal that in the event a candidate could not be found for an office, the President with Board approval could reappoint the incumbent for another year, term limitations notwithstanding. The motion was carried, *nolo contendere*, and Peter Matwey was thereby presented with another term in his dual capacity as Treasurer and Corresponding Secretary, where his outstanding capacities will again be illustrated. After a quick plant sale, members dispersed to continue their Vermont vacations or to return long distances to Pennsylvania, Delaware, New Jersey, Western New York, Connecticut and Massachusetts.

Especial thanks to Bill Dowley for running the barbecue, Suzanne Barnes and Mary Matwey for bringing the hors-d'oeuvres, wine, cookies and brunch, to the Murphys and Doyles for bringing plants, and to everyone else for just bringing themselves and swelling the B & J attendance figures.

And thanks to the Weather God who after 10 weeks of record rains brought us the cool sunny weather to watch the heathers grow - and the charcoals glow.

### Propagating Heather From Cuttings by Harry Bowen

*The following article was written by Harry Bowen 22 years ago for Vol 1, No. 1 issue of the Heather Notes, Spring 1991. These tried and practical instructions for propagating Heather that have served us well.*

Propagating cuttings of hardy shrubs can be a formidable challenge for the inexperienced home gardener. Yet, with heathers, large numbers of many varieties offer the best opportunity for a successful, attractive planting. Being able to propagate one's own stock from a small inventory of basic varieties represents a good approach to gardening satisfaction without undue expense. It also allows for enlarging one's inventory with gifted, bartered or 'pinched' cuttings of rare and interesting varieties.

The following method, modified somewhat for my home use, is basically the one used by Edna and George Mac Kinnon for their commercial production at Waquoit Nurseries. It has proven to me to be simple, successful and not demanding of either time or supplies

Material for cuttings can be collected any time from early September to late December. Ideally, it should be processed immediately but can be safely kept for several weeks if lightly dampened and stored in sealed plastic bags in the refrigerator.

Trays to contain the cuttings while they root are two inch deep wooden frames built with available scrap lumber. The bottom consists of ¼" hardware cloth which is then covered with a single layer of newspaper before the rooting mix, an equal mixture of builder's sand, peat moss, and vermiculite is added. This ratio provides a firm medium which will support the cuttings while allowing for easy penetration of the young roots, good moisture retention and aeration.

Once the rooting trays are ready and the mix is thoroughly moistened, the cuttings can be prepared. They should come from the growth of the current year and be 1 ½ to 2 inches long. (Shorter ones don't do well). Strip the foliage from the lower two thirds with the fingers, not the fingernails, dip the stems in dry rooting hormone ('Rootone' powder containing 0.3% growth-regulating substances) and shake lightly. Using an eight penny nail, make a hole in the rooting mix, insert the cutting up to their foliage, firm in lightly with the fingers and water gently to wash the rooting mixture snugly around the cuttings.

The finished tray is placed firmly on the soil in my solar pit greenhouse. Excess water drains readily while

the soil contact beneath the wire/paper bottom inhibits drying a double thickness of fiberglass window screening protects the cuttings from full sun.

The greenhouse, heated only by the sun, never freezes. With the weak winter sun, cuttings lie dormant for weeks neither rooting nor showing growth of foliage. Water is done only when the soil surface begins to feel dry to the touch - once every week or two, more frequently as the weather warms. The most critical issue in the greenhouse is to provide for adequate ventilation, cool temperatures and low humidity to prevent damping off. This is accomplished by opening the door daily throughout the winter except on the most bleak and dark days. Chilling will not harm the cuttings but a still, hot, moist environment is an invitation to fungal attack. So far it has not been necessary for me to use fungicides.

As the sun climbs, usually by mid-March, a spurt of new green will appear. A gentle tug on a cutting will reveal the resistance of tender new rootlets. By late May the cuttings are large enough to be potted up and moved outdoors. Equal parts of garden soil, peat moss and builder's sand make an acceptable potting mix and three or four inch plastic pots work well for the cuttings. Care should be taken to harden the transplants off for several days before placing in the full sun. They must also be watered faithfully since small pots in the sun dry quickly and the new roots will not tolerate drying.

Growth of these potted plants is rapid, usually fast enough to allow planting in my Cape Cod garden by September. Thus the cycle, garden to garden, is completed within one year. While I do not fertilize heathers in the garden, the growth of the youngsters can be considerably encouraged by light feedings. Two of these using dilute Miracid, the first one month after potting and the second a month later, work well.

My success with this propagating program approaches 100% with most of the Callunas, Ericas, Bruckenthalia and Daboecia. Difficulty is encountered only with certain gray strains of *Calluna vulgaris* such as 'Silver Queen' and 'White Knight' where the success rate is often as low as 60%. No ready explanation comes to mind. These cuttings show no evidence of fungal infection. They simply fail to root, eventually drying up, turning brown and dying.

Although my method uses a solar greenhouse simply because it is available, rooting cuttings in a protected situation could probably be equally successful. Many commercial growers use unheated greenhouses where cuttings are subjected to freezing and thawing throughout the winter. This does not seem to interfere with rooting. Any device such as the Nearing Frame, originally designed for rooting rhododendrons, should work well. The Nearing Frame consists of sunken cold frame, covered with glass and protected from the sun by a three-sided lean-to with the open side facing due north. I plan to try just such a device this fall and will report on it at a later date.

Propagating can be a straightforward and gratifying procedure. So get busy heather gardeners. Gather your cuttings where you may and multiply to your hearts content.

## Even More on Rooting Heathers

by Donald Mackay

Lasdon Park has a small but good library containing the 2<sup>nd</sup> edition of **Manual of Woody Plant Propagation** by Michael Dirr and Charles Heusner. It has a large section on Dirr's personal rooting experiences. He notes hormone treatment is not necessary, but undoubtedly speeds up the rooting process by about half (72 days cut to 46). He reported success with cuttings taken any time in the year but in spring. Cuttings taken as late as January still rooted 90-100% with 1000ppm IBA treatment, stuck in 2:1 peat/perlite with misting. Other methods with bottom heat, poly tunnels and 2:1 sand/peat soil mixtures are also mentioned, giving 90-100% success, again in about half the usual time. He notes there are as many methods of rooting calluna (erica behaves identically) as months in the year. Differences in difficulty in rooting various cultivars are noted. He also describes propagation by sprinkling heather seeds on top of a milled peat surface material at a moist but not soaking level. Germination takes place within 2-3 weeks.

He says one nurseryman reports small cuttings with bottom leaves removed rooted as well as larger cuttings. He says 200 cuttings can be fitted into a 2' x 2' flat, meaning spacing is 14 in a row, about 1½" apart.

The book is well organized and very readable. Like other Dirr books it is on the expensive side, but no doubt worth it if you want to achieve results like the professional growers.

## Little Siberia

by Judy Doyle

One woman-one heather plant=first class heather gardens.

Vivian Branschofsky liked the look of a heather plant she saw in a nursery years ago. She decided to give it a try.

Fast forward to the present: On a perfect summer day attendees of the annual Northeast Heather Society conference touring her lovely heather gardens gaped in awe and admiration. The impeccably groomed beds followed in waves of color the undulating curves of the expansive hillside (which is the “front yard”). Her heather plantings, artfully composed of shades of pink, gold, green, white, gray, lavender, lilac, blend together into an Impressionist painting.

Oh, and then there are the sedum beds, and other plantings of choice perennials, shrubs and trees, all set against the beautiful background of distant mountains.

Vivian speaks passionately about her gardens, and mesmerized us (experienced gardeners all) with rapid-fire recitation of botanical names and anecdotes on just about every one of her plants.

Vivian’s husband, Fritz, designed and built their chalet-style home years ago as a weekend ski retreat.

He told us “Vivian had other ideas”. Together they built a greenhouse and began a perennial nursery on the grounds, naming it “Little Siberia”. The nursery closed about seven years ago. Their planting zone is USDA 3 and 4, the upper reaches of cold hardiness for *calluna vulgaris* and some *Erica*. In early winter Vivian covers all of her heather plants with camouflage netting she scored a long time ago in an Army Surplus store, to protect them from damaging cold winds in case the stereotypical Vermont snow cover is not reliable. One of her fellow heather gardeners, who shall remain nameless but lives not too far away, is envious of this netting technique and is still somewhat chagrined (not to say bitter) that she bought up the whole supply in that area. If anyone knows of a source for camouflage netting, please send it to the editor.



## Von Trapp Family Nursery

by Mary Matwey

The last stop on Saturday’s NEHS Conference Tour was to the Von Trapp Family Nursery. What gardener could pass that up? End of season sales on well-kept plants were great but the most breath taking sights were found touring the display gardens. Graveled paths meandered around a heather garden, a collection of Hydrangea specimens and many mixed perennial plantings. It was not your ordinary nursery as we found out from the very helpful staff because the property was zoned agriculture and they could only sell what was grown on the premises. Since the area was typically zone 4 we took comfort in knowing that all our purchases would survive in their soon to be more temperate home sites.



## Dinner... Down Home Style by Mary Matwey

After several unsuccessful attempts to secure a catering service for our Saturday evening conference dinner, the organizers, Donald Mackay and Bill Dowley, opted for a down home style barbeque. This could not have been a better choice. Hors d'oeuvres of shrimp, veggie pizza slices and Bruschetta preceded the artfully seasoned barbequed chicken and steaks that were so tender you could cut with a plastic knife. The plastic forks were a different story. A bowl of fruit and corn on the cob rounded off a superb meal where the wine flowed freely. Our chef, Bill Dowley, assisted by Pete Matwey with Hans Franke as the carver of the meat are to be commended for a fine job. This hearty repast was made more enjoyable by the table decorations of small heather plants that were gifts to all from Bill Dowley.



## Heather Parlor Show by Mary Matwey

Although it is not a “sit on the edge of your seat with excitement and anticipation” event, for the NEHS heather gardeners, the Heather Parlor Show is a friendly contest to see what heathers others are growing and how well the plant is doing judging by the size and color of the bloom.



This year's winners in Class I, the single flowering Calluna, was 'Goldsworth Crimson' submitted by Mary Matwey. In Class II, double flowering, the winner was Bill Dowley's 'Alice Knight' with foliage already turning orangey, highlighting the lilac/pink flowers. For the purist, this is not a double flowering heather but the color combination alone made it worthy of a 1<sup>st</sup> place. Class II, a flowering Erica, went to Mary for her submittal of 'Mrs. D.F.Maxwell'. In the Class IV category, bud bloomer, Bill and Mary submitted 'Julie Anne' and 'Amilto' respectively tying for 1<sup>st</sup> place. Congratulations to all 5 participants and the 30 heather sprigs submitted for judging.

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*The purpose* of the Northeast Heather Society is to foster interest in growing heathers (*Calluna, Erica, Daboecia, Cassiope, Phyllocladus* 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.

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