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## Asexual Propagation

By Mary Matwey, Master Gardener, Cornell Cooperative Ext. Broome Co. NY (CCE-BC)

CCE-BC is hosting the Master Gardener Training classes for a 5 County region this year.

In years past all the Master Garden training classes were supplied by Cornell Univ. educators but no entity, no matter how large, can escape the effects of cutbacks in funds and personnel in this economy. It appears that western NY Master Gardener training programs will receive the full benefit of the university staff educators this year. Over half of CCE-BC MG training was given by Cornell educators but the rest of the training is scheduled to be supplied by Master Gardeners and community members with expertise in Seed Starting and growing Annuals, growing Vegetables, Perennials, Native plants and Propagation. This is where I come into the picture. I have been dabbling in asexual propagation of ever since I attended the 2003, NEHS/NAHS Heather Conference in Delaware that was so expertly arranged by Paul and Jane Murphy. Bill Dowley was the speaker on propagating heather. His 'Snip, Strip, Dip and Stick' method inspired me take on the quest of propagating heather. I should say elusive quest because I have killed 1000s more heather cuttings than I have been able to root. After doing several weeks of research on asexual propagation (internet and books) I feel that I am comfortable in the re-generative process of cuttings to form adventitious roots and new shoots. I understand the biological process of Mitosis, a cell division process that creates 2 daughter cells with the exact genetic information (DNA) as the parent cell. I understand the role of naturally occurring Auxin from the leaves and Apical Meristem or synthetic Auxins applied to the wound site. The Auxins send signals to initiate the forming of callus tissues to ward off desiccation and entrance of pathogens and ultimately to develop adventitious roots on the cutting.

For this Asexual Propagation presentation, I have setup various demonstrations showing success at:

- adventitious roots on cuttings of *Salix sachalinensis* , Willow
- adventitious roots on cuttings of *Hedera helix* , Ivy
- adventitious roots on cuttings of *Solenostemon scutellarioides*, Coleus
- adventitious roots on leaf cuttings of *Schlumbergera truncate*, Christmas Cactus
- self-pollination of a *Hippeastris*, Amaryllis flower (sexual propagation)

All of the above rooting methods showed results in 30 days or less. In late October, 2013 I used the Forsythe Method to start cuttings of Lavender and various dwarf conifers. Many have rooted and will also be used in the presentation.

Perhaps the most impressive demonstration will be the hands on grafting of tomato plants (F1 Big Beef and Heirloom Amish Paste) onto a tomato rootstock, all of which I have grown from seed. The plants will be the right size for grafting in 1 week.

As a heather enthusiast you will notice an obvious lack of reference to success at rooting heather cuttings. Applying all this logical, substantiated information to a delicate 1/16" diameter heather cutting has not made much of a difference in my success rate.

This is not because I haven't tried but because it is too early to disturb the cuttings in the outdoor propagation boxes and the heather cuttings in the Cloner have not yet sprouted adventitious roots so I don't have to admit my failures yet. Instead I congratulate all nursery men and women who are successful at propagating heather ensuring that we will always have a source for our favorite plants.

## Featured Plants—Bud Bloomers

In late October I purchased 7 bud bloomers at a local Home Depot. They were beautiful and in full color - 2 pots with light pink buds, 2 pots with purple buds and 3 pots with garnet buds. The 1 gallon pots were all 50% off as the store was clearing its yard since Christmas trees were coming. Each pot was \$5!

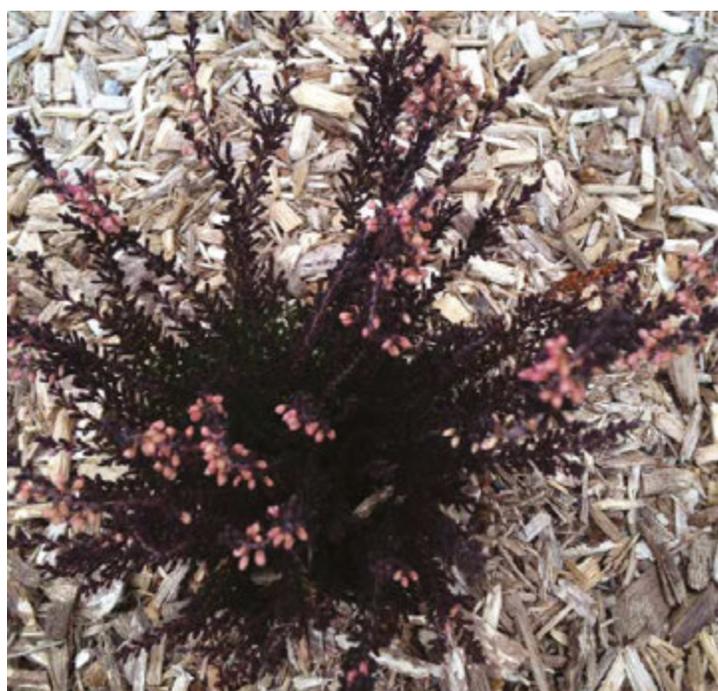
Only downfall was that the generic tags only had the genus and species listed, so I have no idea which cultivar they are. It was such a good deal I could not pass them up.

I planted them in late October in a full sun bed which is next to my house but also receives quite a bit of wind.

They have survived our 15 snowfalls so far this year and it's only mid-February! I am sure the snow cover has helped but am amazed that even the days they have no snow around them they continue to look great.

The usual foliage color was green but the winter foliage is a beautiful dark burgundy shade. The buds you see are actually the buds which were on the plants when I purchased them. The buds are now a light gray.

By: Pat Hoffman, NJ Heather Gardener



## Heather Trimming Events

Ft. Tryon April 5  
 Heritage April 26  
 The Fells May 10  
 Lasdon planting  
 heather bed expansion May 24

NEHS/NAHS Heather Conference August 15-17

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## President's Column

By Donald Mackay

I visited Lasdon Park on March 14 on one of the few days it has been warm enough to melt some snow. The heather garden was mostly snow-covered but enough showed to allow these observations.

All the ericas - even *Erica carnea* 'Springwood White' - were badly damaged by split stems and showed lots of desiccated foliage. Judged by the brittleness of the dead stems the damage dated from the bitter cold of last December when there was little snow cover.

The snow fall had been heavy enough to flatten Cv 'Flamingo', but the other large callunas had stood up well. 'Martha Herrmann' had strong bright green foliage, and a few Callunas showed red foliage above the snow. There was no obvious damage to the callunas. It was clear no winter coverage had been provided. The main work required will be heavy pruning of the ericas, and perhaps replacement of some.

On another note, I received this email from Ted Kozlowski, Manager Lasdon Park Arboretum:

*Donald - The Friends of Lasdon are hosting their annual Plant Sale on May 17. On May 16 we are having a special sneak preview evening here with food , wine/beer and an auction for members only. I pose the following questions to you:*

- 1. Would your group like to participate in the sale on May 17?*
- 2. Could you donate any heathers to the auction? If so you can be our guest at the party.*
- 3. Would you like to participate in any other way?*
- 4. Can you forward our Plant Sale information to your group?*

An official response to Mr. Kozlowski will be forthcoming after our Fort Tryon Board Meeting on April 5, but it is clear it will be positive and that the Auction/Party and Plant Sale can be considered an NEHS Membership Recruiting opportunity. Opportunities to reach out to a select audience such as the Friends of Lasdon come few and far between. I believe that we could make a positive impression at their auction, May 16 and Plant Sale May 17. The plans for the heather bed expansion is another matter requiring heathers, but Bill Dowley has already offered to supply these plants. Plants for the Lasdon Plant Sale still need to be secured, another item for our next Board Meeting.

## I Hope You Dislike Pachysandra by Donald Mackay

Even if you cannot be physically present at the forthcoming Work Party event at Lasdon Park in Somers, Westchester County, NY (set for late May), you can play an important role if you happen to know how to get pachysandra out of heather.

The Garden Director has asked NEHS to expand the Heather Garden to the south, taking over a piece of prime real estate now occupied by pachysandra. The Garden will take care of using qualified people to administer registered herbicides (presumably RoundUp) to kill off the pachysandra (two applications will be needed) but cannot get too close to the Springwood White and Pink which abuts the new extension.

The problem is that pachysandra has already started to invade, so far without detriment to the heathers. Is RoundUp on the main mass going to take care of the invaders? Is physical removal of the invading stems the only answer? We know that even a small piece of pachysandra root is all too capable of regenerating luxuriant growth.

Do you have a special tool, a special technique, a special spell to utter which will solve the problem? All kinds of incantations and suggestions, no matter how desperate, will be considered. Of course, it would be much better if you were there yourself to cast them.

**Annual NEHS Meeting & Conference**  
**August 15 thru 17, 2014**  
**Hosting The North American Heather Society**  
**Registration Form will be in July HN Issue**



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## WERERABBIT

By Mary Matwey

The burlap surround that I put around my heathers in late fall of 2013 collapsed under several, heavy snowstorms. In my article for the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter Heather Notes of 2013, my primary concern were the voles that were making trails between the heather bed and the bird feeding station. As the snow cover increased to a height that equaled the top of the burlap I began to notice feeding damage to the heather sprigs that unfortunately were above the snow cover. That's okay I said to myself, an early trimming shouldn't hurt the plants. However, as the temperatures vacillated between mild to bitter cold the snow depth steadily dropped and I found the rabbits were jumping over the collapsed burlap corral. Arrrgggghhhh!

I whipped out the wire fencing and anchored it to the burlap stakes. Then I threw some permeable cloth on top of the heather which seemed to be the plant of choice for my "wererabbits". This would not be so upsetting if these critters fancied the taste of *Calluna vulgaris* 'Olive Turner' or 'Alba Elegans' but noooooooo. They had to choose 'E.F.Brown', my most favorite heather. It blooms in late fall and looks great planted beside 'Beoley Gold' or 'Gold Haze'. For your next heather purchase consider the combination of 'E.F.Brown' and anything with year round gold foliage. This was a hard winter on wild life I'm sure but as far as I'm concerned, let the rabbits eat bird seed.

## The Other End of the Zone

by Donald Mackay

Going through some odds and ends in my more-or-less unanswered correspondence files I realized I had given a poor answer to a very interesting question that had been raised by Wayne Paquette of Quackin' Grass Nursery in Brooklyn, CT.

In current hopes of making amends with a belated response, I ask for help from all of you in giving a fresh look at the USDA Zones. These are more-or-less horizontal bands across the country with the boundaries corresponding to 10°F (sometimes 5°F) differences in average lowest winter temperature. It's a very handy scheme for describing how perennials like our heathers are likely to survive in winter. But Wayne's question was not how far north can our heathers grow, but how far south?

It's a question we can all handle based on our personal experiences, and we are more than happy to assemble your answers, species by species, cultivar by cultivar.

It is not an easy question to answer, not nearly as easy as to determine viability at the cold end of the spectrum, but similar factors like soil, siting, age, competition, shelter are likely to be there. The one that will be missing is snow cover, and maybe mulching, since mulches can keep the soil cooler in summer.

I can contribute something about calluna's southern limit, which on the east coast I would put somewhere around Philadelphia to Wilmington on the basis that they grow poorly in Baltimore, where the clay soil of the Piedmont is a likely factor, and also in Bethesda, Md just north of Washington, DC where growth seems insufficient to keep neighboring ericas, especially *Erica x darleyensis*, at bay. Both live for a while but do seem to peter out. Judged by what the local nurseries offer, you can buy a few callunas in Bethesda, but not easily in Virginia, a little to the south. The reasons offered are (1) too hot for callunas; (2) spider mites become a major problem.

However, to show the complexity of the situation, remember that altitude is an overriding factor. Art and Judy Pilch run a heather nursery at Selma, NC, which at over 3000' altitude in the foothills of the Great Smokies, produces a wide range of callunas of high quality. Those of you at last year's Annual Conference got to see how well these callunas could perform after -20°F exposures in Zone 3B. So you can guess how well they would do in their native N. Carolina home which is about as far south as Tripoli in North Africa. Probably this is our southern limit for calluna on the east coast, but obviously altitude is the controlling factor.

On the west coast callunas grow beautifully in the Thompson garden in Manchester, CA and of course at Mendocino, and probably would do well in San Francisco or wherever the morning mists can be relied on to prevent sun-scald.

What other answers can you supply?

## ‘Articulture’ by Mary Matway

I went to the Philadelphia Flower Show on March 4. The show theme was ‘Articulture’ taking the two dimensional visual arts (artistic creations of floral and landscape paintings) and bringing it to life in the three dimensional world of the Flower Show. Exhibitors used woodland themes populating them with trees and conifers, flowering spring bulbs, Carexes and other grasses, Salvia, Carnations, Geranium, Begonias, Succulents, Lilies, Hydrangeas and hundreds more . It was exhilarating to see and smell such harbingers of seasons yet to come, especially if you’ve traveled from snow country. Actually Philadelphia herself was still reeling from the latest winter storm and snow banks still lined the streets near the exhibition hall. However, as a heather enthusiast I was very disappointed that not a single heather was used to compliment the colorful floral displays. Spring blooming Erica or winter kissed Calluna foliage would have been an exciting addition to any of the landscape.

Is there any interest by NEHS members in the mid-Atlantic region to enter a landscape design featuring heather at next year’s Philadelphia Flower Show? The New England contingency of the Northeast Heather Society entered a window box in the New England Flower Show in Boston, MA in March, 2006. and was awarded a Second Place ribbon. Nancy Passavant, Priscilla Williams designed the display while Karla Lortz and Bill Dowley provided plants. Nancy also won a blue ribbon for her entry in the individual class with a combo of heather and “Bearberry”.

The pictures to the right were taken of David Wilson’s heather display beds in Chilliwack, BC and Ken Hutchings garden in Mossyrock, WA where the NAHS visited in August during the 2012 during the NAHS Heather Conference. How’s that for ‘Articulture’?

## Keeping Your Heather Compact by Donald Mackay

Ecologists describe the life of heather on the moor in four distinct phases - pioneer, dominant, mature, degenerate - taking from roughly 30 to 40 years for calluna from birth to death. Because of moor management for sheep, grouse, deer, peat cutting, etc. this life cycle is frequently interrupted and plant life can be broken at any stage by grazing pressure or over-frequent muirburn.

Left to itself - as on Nature Reserves where grazing and burning are forbidden - a calluna heather will get leggy to the stage where only a dense tuft of foliage sits atop a bare, polished mahogany stem about 3' long. Some event, snow, wind, traffic will eventually cause the stems to fall outwards like the spokes of a wagon wheel. When the tuft hits the ground a new heather plant may take root, forming a circlet of new heathers around a vacant center.

Not all callunas will behave like the typical wild calluna, nor will ericas readily confirm to the pattern if they are not of the bushy type like the *Erica x mediterranea* hybrids. Some ericas spread like *E. cinerea* or simply tend to collapse, if like *E. tetralix* and its hybrids, the wiry stems are not strong enough to maintain a compact bushy form.

For whatever reason your erica may grow too big (from positive responses to pruning or to fertilization) or develop empty spaces (because of negative responses due to severe winter snow or frost damage). Whether by natural or unnatural means your erica may show unsightly empty spaces in the center of the plant. What can be done about it?

Luckily, ericas like *Erica carnea* and *E. vagans* respond far better to severe pruning than the callunas, and a poorly clad erica stem will usually break with new foliage if cut back. If it doesn't you can try contemplating the unexpected beauty of doughnut-shaped plants.

Or go try what David Wilson did so beautifully with a winter-ravaged heather bed at his BC nursery, and plant different heathers tightly together. If there is enough room try planting a small erica of a different flower or foliage color in the space. And if you try the heavy pruning technique and your plants have failed to respond to your kind intentions, you may well have enough room to give full rein to the Wilson mix and maybe match technique.

## 'Articulture' Heather Style



### Bad Winter for *Erica x darleyensis* & *carnea*

If you didn't think to heavily cover your *Erica x darleyensis* or *Erica carnea* in beds with southern exposures, you may be very disappointed in their survival rate come spring. Every day I gaze out my window onto a south facing heather bed. It had only pine needles as protection and now they are this bare snarl of twigs which were once a beautiful trio of *Erica x darleyensis* full of buds waiting to burst forth into bloom come spring. Donald Mackay's words describing the state of the erica at Lasdon Arboretum in West Chester Co., NY can be applied to the ericas in my garden and Cutler Botanic Garden here in Binghamton, NY as well. They are toast! I hesitate to put photos of 'dead' plants in our Heather Notes but hopes springs eternal because I recall in the year 2000, a hard trimming brought Cutler's *Erica x darleyensis* 'Silberschmelze' back to life. It is interesting to note that the *Erica carnea* and *Erica x darleyensis* in my front, north-facing heather bed are looking in better shape with a few bare branches on the south side of the plants. Question: Could it be that the combination of the warmth of the indirect rays of the winter sun and frigid temperatures is the real culprit here?



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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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All material may be edited for clarity and length.

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March 20–June 20–September 20–December 20

