



Waiting for Godot Donald Mackay

It's not so much existential (whatever that means) as unreal, though my view of the outside temperature sensor on the shelf opposite tells me the current warm spell is real enough. Should I worry about my heathers? Should I leave them alone? Should I remove the evergreen branches and oak leaves so laboriously laid upon them barely three weeks ago? Should I add even more in anticipation of some cruel joke being formulated by Mother Nature? The answers I propose are Maybe, Yes, No and No.

With so much labor and love already expended on heathers, it is natural to worry when the normal rhythm of the year is interrupted, but whether that worry is enough to prompt action is another matter. Taking off the oak leaves is like taking off the seat belt because you've had no car accidents in the past five years. And putting more on is an admission of a job shirked, that you didn't really put enough on in the first place. But if you've got nothing on so far, you'd better do it now while the warm weather lasts.

Having so neatly taken care of the labor problem we can consider what remedies are available for the worriers looking at the snowless ground. We can listen to the earth warmers saying I told you so, or to the naysayers who can find some rationale for belief in the law of averages. Of course, it isn't a law, just the kind of belief that takes the gambler at Las Vegas from unhappiness through incredulity to despair and eventually bankruptcy. If there is a law of averages, you can be sure it is the casino that benefits.

The important questions (a) whether to leave the bud-bloomers uncovered while we enjoy them for the next few days - they're lovely now - (but have cover ready) or (b) whether the warm spell now (12° above the normal December for Vermont) is just a balance to the cold spell (14° below the February average for Vermont) that we got at the beginning of the year, or, is it a harbinger, a forerunner, a premonition of the extremely bitter cold that is sure to follow, if not next week, then the week after.

With temperatures near or above 70° predicted for Christmas, I sense that the law of averages has yet to hit us. So I'm keeping my heathers covered and hoping they won't suffocate. I may even add a few oak leaves. Not that I'm superstitious or believe in bad luck for the unprepared, but you never know, you never know. We just have to keep on waiting for Godot.

Footnote: Existentialism - various doctrines denying objective universal values and holding that a person must create values for himself through action and by living each moment to the full. From Chambers Dictionary.

Editor's Comment: 'Waiting For Godot' - A play by Samuel Beckett about the futility of waiting.

Comments and Insights on the Name Heather

Long ago, the moors were very lonely because nothing would grow there. Every plant they asked refused, and the moors were even more desolate than usual. Finally word got around to the plucky little heather who cheerfully volunteered. And ever since, the heather has not only grown but thrived on the moors which are more beautiful and less lonely as a result.

Heather = selfless and caring; survives, thrives even in difficult circumstances

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VOTE

Well the votes are in and The Society thanks each and everyone who participated to elect the slate of officers and Board members for the NEHS 2016 term. There was an impressive 40% participation. Thank You All !

Calendar of Events 2016 Trimming Heathers:

Fort Tryon.....	April 9
Manhattan, NY	
Heather Propagation ...	April 9
Fort Tryon	
Heritage.....	April 30
Sandwich, MA	
The Fells.....	TBA
Newbury, NH	

FEATURED PLANT: Wild Heather – ‘Lüneberg’

Photo Courtesy of Kurt Kramer



The Heathered Colors by Mary Matwey

Ever wonder where the term ‘heather’ as it applies to fabric colors came from? As a heather enthusiast, I dared to hope that it really could be attributed to that wonderfully, soft, muted color effect of a heather bed, in or out of bloom? I set about looking for any snippet of information that would support this speculation. Having absolutely no books on cloth or colors in my limited home library and being too lazy to go to the ‘Public Library’ I did the next best thing. I googled it. After asking the same question, ‘What was Scotland’s role in the creation of the heathered colors?’ in about 20 + different ways, I was rewarded the following article. Google had scanned 1300 pages of a periodical titled ‘Textile World’ creating a searchable electronic file. From this document (Textile World, December 10, 1921, Volume 60, Issue 24, page 39) it found enough word matches to display this short article. I will quote only that portion relating to the proposed origin of heathered colors.

“The dictionary definition of the name heather is a plant or shrub that grows wild in different parts of Europe. Heath is the general or common name; there is one kind called heather and another “ling”. In Scotland there are two species whose flowers are the heather bells of Scottish song and story.

The following relating to the origin of heather mixtures is given by a cloth merchant who in his time did much to foster the Scottish tweed trade and widely introduce the goods into new markets: “When gentlemen of the rod and gun began to inquire for that which would resemble the shooting ground, we had nothing of the kind, neither was there any in the market. We wrote to a Galashiel’s house for a range, but they replied they had never heard of such an article. By the following post we requested them just to imitate Buckholm Hill, which over-shadowed them, and was at that time in beautiful bloom. A boy was dispatched to bring some heather. Now, when a handful of this was crushed together it had different shades varying with the seasons. This proved to be the very thing we wanted, and led to the introduction of a variety of colorings before unknown. This was the origin of “heather mixtures”.”

Heather (fabric) From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

In clothing, **heather** refers to interwoven yarns of mixed colors producing flecks of an alternate color. It is typically used to mix multiple shades of grey or grey with another color to produce a muted shade (e.g., heather green), but any two colors can be mixed including bright colors. It is sometimes referred to as a frosting color.



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The Many Faces of Heather by Mary Matwey

The emphasis in this issue of Heather Notes is on things, plants, people or processes that have the word Heather associated with their name. Maintaining the connection to their roots, our European ancestors used the term loosely to name unfamiliar plants that physically resembled heath and heather in leaf, or flower, growth habit or culture. The following are a few excerpts from the myriad of documents that my computer search engines found containing the word “Heather”.

Aster ericoides (White Heath Aster)

Heath Aster is very easy to grow in medium to dry soils. It is rhizomatous and will self-seed readily, so some may consider it aggressive. It will spread 1+ feet per year. Heath Aster will do well in USDA zones 3-10. Other names commonly used include *Symphotrichum ericoides* or White Heath Aster. The white ray flowers can occasionally look light blue or pale pink, with a yellow center. The leaves are small, numerous and closely crowded, as in heaths. In a planting without much other vegetation to support it, Heath Aster may need to be staked or it will droop over. The white flowers explode profusely all along the stem of the plant in late summer and early fall, providing that last bit of color to a garden before winter.

Noter: My husband and I had the pleasure of visiting Hickory Hill Heath and Heather nursery owned by Paul and Jane Murphy in the fall of 2015. Although the white bloom of the heath aster was almost gone you could tell from the 3' spread of this plant that it must have been magnificent in full bloom. Jane shared a few tip cuttings with me which unfortunately did not survive. A more viable cutting would be one that had a few of the rhizomatous roots attached. Hint Hint.



Cuphea hyssopifolia (Mexican Heather)



Mexican heather thrives in full sun to partial shade. Whether you use Mexican heather (*Cuphea hyssopifolia*) in your home landscape as ground cover, border plants or in hanging baskets, this small shrub adds a hefty dose of cool color to the garden. Mexican heather displays an abundant bloom of small light-purple, white and pink flowers throughout most of the year in addition to green foliage. Reaching a height of up to 2 feet, these evergreens resist most pest and disease problems. Grow Mexican heather, also known as false heather, in U.S. Department of Agriculture hardiness zones 8b to 11 for successful growth. In climates colder than USDA zone 9, Mexican heather grows as an annual and needs to be replanted every spring.

Often called false heather because it's not related to the more common Scotch heather (*Calluna vulgaris*), its small-leafed, ferny foliage does, however, resemble heather's.

Excerpts from 'Australian Heaths'
By Brian Walters

It's a considerable source of irritation to those who appreciate the native plants of Australia to hear exotic names applied to them. It's understandable, I suppose, that early European settlers would describe the local flora in familiar terms. But that was over 200 years ago!!! So why do we persist using names for plants when the plant does not remotely resemble its namesake.

The name "Australian Heaths" is also a bit irritating. These are members of the Epacris family (Epacridaceae) and they have a superficial similarity to the heaths (mainly Erica) of Europe and Africa. Some botanists even believe that the Australian heaths should be transferred to the Erica family (Ericaceae), so I suppose we can live the the term 'heath' being applied to the Australian plants.



Epacris impressa
'Common Heath'

This plant has small leaves, typical of the "heaths", and the long, tubular flowers may be pink, red or white. It grows to about 0.5 metres

Ematurga atomaria (Common Heath Moth)



The Common Heath (*Ematurga atomaria*) is a moth of the family Geometridae.

The species can be found in the Palearctic ecozone from the Iberian peninsula in the West, Central and Eastern Europe and East to Siberia and Sakhalin. In the South, its range includes the Northern Mediterranean and the Turkish part of the Black Sea region.[1]

The wingspan is 24-34 millimetres (0.9-1.3 in). The colour is variable ranging from yellow-brown to dark brown. The appearance is mottled with bands and spots. The brown cross bands on both forewings and hindwings vary in width and there may be no cross bands at all only small dark brownish spots. Males have comb-like antennae. Females are usually brown with a dusting of white but can be almost white with a series of brown crosslines.[2]

The moths fly in one generation from May to June.[Note 1] The caterpillars feed on a heather, heath and clovers.

Bolster Heath

Bolster heath From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia : **Bolster heath** or **cushion moorland** is a type of vegetation community that features a patchwork of very low growing, tightly packed plants found at the limits of some [alpine](#) environments. The [cushion plants](#) form a smooth surfaced 'cushions' from several different plants, hence the common name of **cushion heath**. The cushion growth habit provides protection against the desiccating wind and help keep the cluster warm. Bolster heath is very slow growing and thus very fragile. Most propagation is by slow expansion, although two species, [Abrotanella forsteroides](#) and [Pterygopappus lawrencei](#) produce enough viable seed to survive fire. The other species are generally permanently destroyed by fire. The soil in bolster heath is generally quite poor, often gravel with a thin layer of [peat](#).



Until a few years ago it would have been easy to list a number of plants that looked or acted like heaths and heathers. Mostly they were already classified as *Ericads*, like the *Epacris* of Australia and Tasmania, and the *Leucopogon* and *Cyathodes* of New Zealand, or on this continent the heather look-alike *Empetrum nigrum* (the Crowberry). The closely related Moss Heather (*Cassiope*) and the Mountain Heather (*Phyllodoce*) of the Pacific Northwest mountain ranges were already in the *Ericaceae*, before E.G.H. Oliver of South Africa, the world expert on Ericas, got round to expanding the botanical definition of *Ericaceae* to include several distant cousins that had been classified as *Ericads*, such as *Clethra alnifolia*, the Sweet Pepper Bush, a common shrub 6 to 10 ft. high.

Empetrum nigrum - and its sometimes differentiated *E. atropurpureum* - do indeed look like heathers much of the year until their tiny insignificant flowers turn into shiny black berries. They grow on rocky mountain summits in New England and as a fringe on the very edge of rocky islands off the coast of Maine down to southern New England and the Pine Barrens of New Jersey. They have a larger relative called *Corema conradii* (or Broom Crowberry), which grows especially well on Cape Cod and forms an extensive area over much of Marconi State Park. However, they are straggly plants of little or no garden value, quite unlike the *E. nigrum* which is a delightful plant that will grow well if you can find the conditions to suit it. It seems to like sandy soil, and in the sandy headlands of coastal Oregon around Gold Beach they cover acres of dunes overlooking the beaches and look very heather-like indeed.

There is another plant that likes sandy soil, and can be found on the Atlantic coast from Maine down to the mid-Atlantic states. It looks very much like a heather, and comes in two versions, one hairy and one smooth that look just like regular and gray-foliaged heathers. But alas they are not heathers,



though in habit and needle-like leaves they look so much like heathers it is only when they show tiny yellow flowers that it is clear they are not. They are members of the Rock Rose family, namely *Hudsonia tomentosa* and *H. ericoides* (Golden Heather). The former bears the common names of Beach Heath, False Heather and Poverty Grass and would indeed fit well into a heather garden if it could be transplanted. However, like other plants that grow in sand, they have wide running roots that do not retain soil around them, the sand just dribbling away until you are left holding a bare-root plant, that unlike other bare-root plants, shows no period of dormancy to allow the roots to regain function. There is a third species, *H. Montana*, with orange flowers found sparsely on a few North Carolina hills, but carpeting them like heather where it does occur.

The only successful *Hudsonia* replanting I have heard of is a plant that was watered very heavily in a bitterly cold winter until the plant could be lifted as a block of frozen sand. It may be an apocryphal story, but one that indicates the well-nigh impossibility of getting it into your garden.

There is another vaguely-looking heather plant that is easy to get into your garden and that is Mexican Heather (*Cuphea hyssopifolia*), which becomes a blue-flowered shrublet of a certain attraction that will last as long as summer does. It may be a perennial in Mexico, but in our area it will not last the winter. There is also Hawaiian heather, but that is just another name for Mexican Heather. In Hawaii it has naturalized to become a serious weed. In England, however, it gets more respect and earned the Royal Horticultural Society Award of Garden Merit in 2002.

There is also a plant family called the Figworts containing a large genus called *Veronica*, which, perhaps because of the very wide variability in size, flower, habit, color leaf size, etc., etc. has undergone a name change and reclassification, sometimes being a *Veronica*, sometimes a *Hebe*.

Notably, there are what are called the Whipcord Hebes, which because of their tightly appressed scale-like leaves do very much look like heather stems but without the usual branching pattern. One yellow form particularly looks like a yellow calluna, and I think it makes a useful addition to the garden. It is sold generally in England, so presumably is reasonably hardy. It grows well in the Pacific Northwest, anyway. *The Hillier Manual of Trees & Shrubs* (2002) lists about 70 Hebes, many of which are dwarf or rock garden plants. Some Whipcords are listed, but no reference to heather is made. Some Hebes are now called Parahebes, again woody shrublets that could be heather-like, but not described so.

Hortus lists about 50 Hebes separated from *Veronica*. All but one come from New Zealand, and nearly all are shrubs or small trees, and most have fairly large leaves. None appear to resemble that yellow-foliaged Whipcord plant growing in my brother's garden in Winslow, near Manchester, England. But under about 40 plants listed under *Veronica*, many of which seem to come from Asia Minor, and nearby mountains, one finds "*Veronica spicata*, var. *corymbosa*, to 1 ft. fls. pale blue. Var. *Erica*, heather-like, fls. pink. Var. *nana* to 9 in., fls. blue. Var. *rosea* fls, purplish pink." *Veronica Erica* is also listed under its own name as a variety of *V. spicata*. I admit I am confused. I thought for sure the heather look-alikes were under *Hebe*, but it is clear the hybridizers have been busy. Sports, seedlings and natural hybrids abound.

Hillier does list two heather look-alikes under *Cassinia*. These are Golden Heather (*C. fulvida*) and Silver Heather (*C. Albida*), both from New Zealand and grown for their foliage effect and hardiness. Described as heath-like shrubs of dense habit, they actually belong to the *Compositae* family, under the new name of *Ozothamnus leptophyllus*.

Finally, there is a plant which is not a heather and does not claim to be, but which has every right to be in a heather garden. I refer to *Campanula rotundifolia*, better known as the Bluebells of Scotland, but widespread through the moors and hills of Europe and America. It is particularly prominent along Hurricane Ridge in Washington State, where they bloom in splendor. On impulse I bought a plant at a local Vermont nursery, but was surprised to find that though it looked like a bluebell, smelled like a bluebell, had the color and distinctive shape of a bluebell, it was not a duck but a dwarf multistemmed variety of some *Campanula* variety. It bloomed continuously until after the first heavy frost and started to grow into the neighboring heather, conferring its pretty color upon the evergreen which had long lost its flowers. However, *C. rotundifolia* flowers are known to come in both single stem and clustered forms, so perhaps the nurseryman was right after all.

If you look up heather in the index of various references, you will find that this name is widely applied to different plants, so if only to acknowledge the implied flattery it is probably worth a little investment of time and space to fit at least a few of them into a heather garden.

So give it a try, especially with the Crowberry. But don't eat the berries, even if they look like blueberries. Only crows could like them, and I'm not even sure they do.

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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

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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

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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

