

The Heather Society Newsletter Spring 2019



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Diary 2019

RHS Wisley Gardens	7th September 2019
THS AGM	14th September 2019



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Foreword

Welcome to The Heather Society's Spring 2019 Newsletter. I have edited this edition with a sad heart based on the losses we have suffered recently. We pay tribute to Donald Mackay and Jean Preston. I enlisted the help of some beautiful landscape shots for my front cover, the bottom and top photos taken by David Plumridge on a visit to RHS Harlow Carr.

Samantha Barnes

Chairman's Piece

The Heather Society has a parallel with current UK politics, a closing date ahead and various functions to undertake.

With the planned closure of The Heather Society in its current form as a registered charity in sight, and the proposed formation of a replacement body of erstwhile 'club members', I look to see by what means and form we leave our heritage to the remaining generation of heather enthusiasts and for the interest of the general public.

I note the sad passing of our member Jean Preston (formerly Jean Julian), I was informed subsequently of a cultivar that I was not aware of until I looked at the list of registered cultivars.

Erica x williamsii 'Jean Julian'

Wild-collected (plant 12); found by Jean on 9 September 1999 at Kynance Cove, The Lizard, Cornwall.

I note that this variety name is not listed in the RHS Wisley Heather Collection, is Jean's heather lost to cultivation?

Whilst I am not aware of the merits of this particular cultivar it raises the subject of the future of many of our historical and more rare heather cultivars not in cultivation or collections such as at Perth, Wisley or Holehird.

Unfortunately I was unable to attend the recent planned Council Meeting when my vehicle let me down in the extended traffic queue. The meeting was therefore not quorate meaning that decisions could not be actioned on this occasion. My apologies to those Council Members who undertook to attend.

David Edge

Reminder

Members are reminded that the current subscription rate is £10 per member, per annum both for the UK and the Rest of the World. If you haven't already done so then please make the appropriate adjustment to Standing Orders and other Methods of Payment. Any excess payment will be considered to be a donation. Subscriptions made via Paypal have already been adjusted.

Allison Fitz-Earle
Membership Secretary

Society events & news

Arrangements for the 2019 AGM of The Heather Society

The 2019 AGM will be held at RHS Harlow Carr on Saturday 14th September.

Provisional programme:

10:00 Assemble at the entrance
10:30 Guided Tour of the Gardens
12:30 Lunch (own arrangements)
13:30 AGM
14:30 Talk, speaker and subject to be announced
16:30 Depart

There are many visitor attractions in the area around RHS Harlow Carr and members may wish to make a weekend visit to the area, if so members requiring overnight accommodation are requested to make their own arrangements.

It would be helpful if members can indicate their interest in attending the event by contacting the Hon. Secretary by e-mail secretary@heathersociety.org or by phone to 023 8086 4336. Entrance to the gardens will be free for participating members.

Phil Joyner
Hon. Secretary

Website Continuing Work

All of the usable slide library images are now on the website. Jean Preston helped me with this task, before she passed away. We have 1640 cultivars listed on the website. Virtually all of what is in the Handy Guide, plus all new registered cultivars since. Approximately 60% of the *Calluna* have images of some sort, and 80% of both the *Daboecia* and *Erica*. The *Calluna* percentage should have been higher, but I could never find the cultivars in the Wisley National Collection.

The future of the website, is somewhat tied to the future of the Society, which, as many know, is soon to be restructured to further reduce the cost and time to run the organisation. However, the website will remain under my control until at least 2026. There will, inevitably, be some changes when the Society changes operation especially in the members' database, payment facilities and members' area.

What exactly we will have is yet to be decided. However, the basic content of the website, i.e. the cultivar listings, back-level documentation, etc. will remain. As with all websites, technology is constantly changing and this will require changes to the website structure over time.

If you see any errors in the website content, please let me know.

Dave Brown
Webmaster

Jean Preston
1944 - 2019

The Society is sad to announce the passing of Jean Preston on 22nd January 2019.



Above-Jean at Harlow Carr

Jean was an amazing person, who found time to get involved in a wide range of community and charitable activities, and she was very well known in her local community. Her love of heathers and concern for environmental conservation led her to joining The Heather Society in 1990, and we were fortunate to gain a member with such energy and organisational ability. Her invaluable contributions to the Society began almost immediately, when she was closely involved in the Harlow Carr heather trials with her soon-to-become husband Albert Julian. She and Albert co-authored two papers in the 1992 and 1993 Yearbooks on "Heathers in Yorkshire", which among other things described the heather planting at the handsome new entrance to Harlow Carr Gardens, a planting in which they played a major role. Those beds continue to provide a dramatic colourful welcome to visitors to the Garden today and are a fitting testament to Jean. Sadly Albert passed away in 2001, but Jean continued to serve the Society as a member of Council for another 11 years.

Jean's first official Society appointment was as slide librarian in 1992, and during 1993 she was appointed to Council. In 1999 she took on the office of Registrar, with responsibility for registering new cultivars. In 2001 she became Secretary, a position placing particular demands on her time and one which she held for 11 years, finally stepping down in 2012 to continue in her less stressful role as custodian of the Society's slides. During all these activities Jean somehow also found time to resurrect the Yorkshire Heather Group, which had faded away after the demise of its organiser Ken Barraclough, and as Secretary and Treasurer for the Group she organised talks and visits for the membership. The meetings were held at Harlow Carr, where Jean's many contacts with the Garden's hierarchy proved invaluable. At these meetings she also provided refreshments, often in the form of delicious cakes and biscuits of her own baking. Jean also had a broad knowledge of the practicalities of heather propagation and growing and was always happy to share this knowledge with others.



Above-Jean at the Himalayan Garden, N. Yorkshire.

Jean will be sadly missed by so many. The Society extends its condolences to Jean's husband Michael.

John Griffiths
President

Photographs taken by David Plumridge.

Group News

All members are welcome to attend any of the local group events

Home Counties/South West Group

Members of The Heather Society convened at the entrance to Sir Harold Hillier Gardens on 17 February 2019 at 11 am. It was a pleasant warm day.

We were greeted by Fran Clifton, Head Gardener at the Gardens. Fran gave us an introductory talk about the history of the garden by its founder Sir Harold Hillier together with how the gardens had developed over the years.

Members were pleased to understand the history of the garden which was established in 1953 and the legacy arrangements put in place with Hampshire County Council taking on a Trusteeship. We were also pleased to learn that the garden is home to a number of plant collections and is high on the ranking in terms of conservation of plant and tree species.

Hillier Gardens has one of the largest collections of hardy trees and shrubs in the world. The garden of 180 acres has a selection of different areas showing a wide range of growing conditions. A world class winter garden, a bog and peat garden, a pond area with marginal plants, a vast arboretum, heather gardens and dwarf conifer beds, woodlands and meadows. Some of their large plant collections include *Camellias*, *Rhododendrons* and *Magnolias*.

We made our way initially to the winter garden where a number of *Erica carnea* cultivars were in flower. These included *Erica carnea* 'Bell's Extra Special', 'Ann Sparkes', 'Foxhollow', and 'Dorset Sunshine' as well as *Erica x arendsiana* 'Charnwood Pink', whose flowers were largely over.

Then we made our way to the Heather Garden via the Centenary border. The Heather Garden is located in front of Jermyns House, which is reckoned to date from 1822. On purchasing Jerman's Farm in 1822, which lay some 5km from his seat at Hursley Park, Sir Thomas Freeman Heathcote, with Col Gilbert Heathcote, altered and enlarged the existing house and laid out a garden and plantations. The Gardens are included in Historic England's Register of Historic Parks and Gardens as grade II.

The Heather Garden was neatly arranged in island beds of various sizes and the mounding of the garden added extra interest. A number of winter flowering heathers were in bloom including *Erica carnea* 'Nathalie', 'March Seedling', 'Isabell', *Erica x darleyensis* 'Arthur Johnson', 'Lucie' and 'Kramer's Rôle'. We headed back via the Valley garden passing clumps of magnificent bamboos.



Above-Bust of Sir Harold Hillier overseeing the Heather Garden.

On arriving back at the entrance pavilion we queued for lunch and ate this in a room set aside for the THS meeting. There we sat chatting about heathers and the Society. We suggested having another event at the Gardens.

Home Counties next event

RHS Wisley Garden: 7th September 2019

Meet at 10.30 am outside the entrance or 11 am at the new National Heather Collection for a walk around the heather garden.

The RHS Wisley Flower Show will be on at this time and David Edge will be displaying a range of heathers from Forest Edge Nursery for sale in the marquee.

Barry Sellers

North East Group

A Happy New Year to all our members. In spite of the very Topsy-Turvy weather, our heathers have stood up very well and have given us a colourful display.

Within the North East Group there are very few members who are nearby and able to drive the distance. Having only 5 members means we are unable to have meetings.

On that 'cheerful note', I wish all members a good heather gardening season.

Dorothy Warner

Yorkshire group

There are no upcoming events planned for the Yorkshire group.

Sadly after the passing of Jean Preston, the group consists of just three couples.

Samantha Barnes

Important

For those members who are on-line and who haven't provided an email address or have recently updated their e-mail address then please provide the Society with a valid e-mail address so that access to the members only area of the website can be made possible allowing future newsletters and other paperwork to be made available electronically.

See the website or page 12 for contact details.

Cuttings Exchange Scheme

This scheme is a unique facility for those members who are interested in propagating their heathers from cuttings.

It is a golden opportunity to obtain cultivars which are only very rarely found in garden centres and nurseries these days, and, at the same time, helps to preserve some of these lovely plants for posterity.

For more details - you can phone me on 01885 482206, email me at dandmeverett@gmail.com or fill in the form in the 'members' section of the website.

We regret that the Cuttings Exchange Scheme applies to UK members only.

Daphne Everett

**The *Daboecia* National Collection within
Holehird Gardens**

A National Collection of cultivars of the genus *Daboecia* is held within Holehird Gardens. Holehird Gardens is an extensive 10 acre site located within the Lake District National Park near Windermere. The gardens are the home of the Lakeland Horticultural Society. The gardens contain a large variety of plants, particularly those suited to the local climate with its high rainfall.

The Heather Society is pleased to have made a small grant to the Lakeland Horticultural Society to enable them to enhance and maintain the *Daboecia* Collection and in addition enhance and maintain the other areas of heath and heather within the garden.

Brenda Leese, who is one of a group of volunteers responsible for maintaining the heaths and heathers within the Gardens, submits regular reports to the Council of The Heather Society on the *Daboecia* Collection. An extract of Brenda's most recent report (February 2019) follows:

"In common with elsewhere in England we have had a very mild winter at Holehird so far. In contrast to last winter when the *Daboecia* Collection gave a very good imitation of being completely dead with brown stem and no leaves, this year they are very much alive and the leaves have remained green. This is a great relief.

Cuttings were taken last autumn, with some being placed in the frame and others in the dewpoint. So far, about half seem to have survived, which is quite good going for us.

Val Jeffreys and I have given talks to the North Lakeland Horticultural Society and the Bothel Gardens Group during March. This was a good opportunity to educate people about *Daboecia*. Holehird is also going to have information boards for visitors for the four National Collections in the garden and I am currently thinking about what to write and which pictures to use."

After submitting her report, I asked Brenda to supply some photos and compile a list of the species and their cultivars currently held within the *Daboecia* Collection and that list is as follows:

***Daboecia cantabrica*:**

'Alba', 'Alba Globosa', 'Alberta White', 'Amelie', 'Andrea', 'Angelina', 'Arielle', 'Atropurpurea', 'Bicolor', 'Blueless', 'Bubbles', 'Celtic Star', 'Chaldon', 'Charles Nelson', 'Cinderella', 'Cleggan', 'Covadonga', 'Creeping White', 'Cupido', 'David Moss', 'Donard Pink', 'Eskdale Baron', 'Glamour', 'Harlequin', 'Heather Yates', 'Hookstone Purple', 'Lilac Osmond', 'Pink Blum', 'Pink Lady', 'Pinky Perky', 'Polifolia', 'Porter's Variety', 'Praegerae', 'Purple Blum', 'Rainbow', 'Rodeo', 'Romantic Muxoll', 'Rosea', 'Rosella', 'Sarah', 'Sid Brown', 'Snowdrift', 'Stardust Muxoll', 'Tinkerbell', 'Valvinsan', 'Vanessa', 'Waley's Red', 'White Blum', 'White Carpet'.



Above- *Daboecia cantabrica* 'Bicolor'



Above- *Daboecia cantabrica* 'Bubbles'



Above- *Daboecia cantabrica* 'HeatherYates'

Daboecia x scotica:

'Barbara Phillips', 'Bearsden', 'Ben', 'Cora', 'Ellen Norris', 'Golden Imp', 'Goscote', 'Jack Drake', 'Katherine's Choice', 'Red Imp', 'Robin', 'Silverwells', 'Tabramhill', 'Thumbelina', 'William Buchanan', 'William Buchanan Gold'.



Above- *Daboecia x scotica* 'Golden Imp'



Above – Part of the Collection.

Members of The Heather Society have had the privilege of visiting the Gardens on a couple of occasions the last occasion being during the 2011 Conference based in the Lake District.



The Heather Society wishes the Lakeland Horticultural Society every success with bringing heaths and heathers, to the attention of the public. I particularly wish to thank Brenda Leese and the team of volunteers for their dedication to looking after our favourite plants.

Phil Joyner

2018 - A summer to forget?

I hope not.

Water butts full of rainwater didn't last long. Amateur gardeners in areas affected by hosepipe bans were especially concerned in attempts to obey, or outwit, the authorities, and heather growers usually have large swathes of plants to protect. Most of us probably wish that the relentless sunshine and relatively high temperatures do not return, unless, of course, we pay for them by going on holiday.

The pundits predict otherwise, however climate change, whatever the causes, will not reverse in the near future, and with that in mind perhaps we *should* remember how our plants weathered the summer, work out what might be available in future to help them, and try to predict which might need extra protection.

I, for one, suddenly felt the need for more guidance from the experts than is available in books written in very different times, different climes, and wondered if the experiences of others could add to my own which are based merely on observation rather than botanical knowledge. Small & Wulff (2008: 48, 250) have advice on watering adult plants and identifying drought-resistant species. Underhill (1990: 50-1) briefly describes the methods used at Ness Botanic Gardens to give plants the best watering. Lortz (2002: 9, 108) offers the most complete guide to tackling drought, based on her experiences in Washington state.

My overriding memories of the summer are threefold. One is of the radically different ways species reacted to the abnormal amount of sunlight and heat, with the latter a problem even for the partly shaded plants. I don't know which has been worse for the plants, light or heat. Another is the effect on different areas of heathers planted on sloping or shaded ground, where common sense suggests that the higher and more exposed will run short of groundwater first. Finally, in the weeks following the return of rain, wondering which of the plants badly affected are dead, dying, or merely lying low until the friendly fire of summer has gone away.

1. My heathers, all of which are on south facing ground, bore the summer conditions in remarkably different ways, and made little sense of Lortz's list of the order in which they are likely to die. Some were able to survive with seemingly little adverse effect.

Many even seem to thrive in the conditions, especially those with yellow foliage (*Erica carnea* 'Golden Starlet' and *Calluna vulgaris* 'Beoley Gold'). Even some of the more open plants, which allow light and heat to reach the ground, had a new lease of life, with *Daboecia x scotica* 'William Buchanan' (a summer success story) invading the neighbouring *Erica carnea* 'Myretoun Ruby' taking advantage of her moribund state. *E. vagans* 'Lyonesse', *E. vagans* 'Mrs. D. F. Maxwell' (and their unnamed offspring, a very vigorous founding pink) received no watering during the summer drought. *C. vulgaris* 'Darkness', *E. darleyensis* 'Jack H. Brummage', *E. vagans* 'St. Keverne', all thrived, and *E. cinerea* 'Harry Fulcher' fared better than *E. cinerea* 'Eden Valley', though the latter recovered quite quickly, as did *E. x stuartii* 'Irish Lemon'. All my *E. cinerea*, Lortz's most threatened species, survived. At the other end of the scale, a few heathers were lost altogether, notably *C. vulgaris* 'Dark Beauty', and *E. x darleyensis* 'Darley Dale', especially those not in the best health before the summer.

Yates (1983) noted that in Harrogate trials in 1975 and 1978, losses 'were confined to a very few plants that did not appear to be fully healthy before the dry weather'. *E. x darleyensis* has proved sensitive to these conditions, and I've lost almost all *E. x darleyensis* 'Jenny Porter', and some *E. x darleyensis* 'Margaret Porter'. The mark of this final state was the loss of all brown foliage, leaving a ground spread of dirty, grey branches. Between these extremes, a wide range of conditions, with one bed of morning-shaded *E. carnea* 'Myretoun Ruby' in a very sorry state though not beyond all hope. The other bed of the same cultivar, with afternoon shade, started to bud in early September.

2. Did plants at the top of a slope, or in no shade, fare worse than those below them? Not particularly. It seems that either the cultivar itself, or maybe its age (and therefore depth of roots?) made a more significant difference. At the top of one slope, *E. erigena* 'W. T. Rackcliff' remained as green as ever, while the adjoining *C. vulgaris* 'Spring Torch' appears to be almost burnt out. At the top of another slope, *E. cinerea* 'Velvet Night' and *C. vulgaris* 'Kirby White' held their own, while further down, in an area which must have been both wetter and more shaded, *E. x darleyensis* 'Darley Dale' is now defunct. There was some evidence that, if shade is available, it is much more beneficial in the afternoons than the mornings.

3. Once again, those which were badly affected showed the effects of drought differently, there seeming to be no way to predict the degree of damage. At one end of the scale, beds of *E. carnea* 'Foxhollow' and *E. x darleyensis* 'Margaret Porter' developed a little area of brown foliage, like a man's head showing a bald patch, presumably where the roots of a single plant could no longer gather enough water, and had succumbed. By September, they each had new green growth which, on careful inspection, was found to be directly from the roots, not from part way along a branch that had turned brown. The only generalisation which I could make on such limited experience is that waiting for foliage to show signs of turning brown before emergency watering is already too late. As Lortz put it more pithily, 'If they look dry they are already dead'. On the other hand, there may be too many variables to make possible a general rule such as 'water heathers after *n* days without rain'. Lortz quotes Descloux's useful guidance - for three year old plants, 'supplemental watering only after two or more weeks without rain'; for the fourth year onwards, 'water only in times of drought, a month without rain.'

Removing the morbidly-grey, leafless and lifeless corpses, now ironically rain-soaked, is simple enough, hoping that they will be replaced naturally by the ubiquitously spreading foundlings of *E. cinerea* and *E. vagans*. However, removing apparently dead, certainly ugly, brown-leaved branches through which plenty of new growth is showing is both difficult and questionable. (At least any sprouting grass can be easily seen against this dark background, and can itself be uprooted.) How do we tell the difference between death of the roots and 'merely' scorching? How do we guard against overwatering in drought conditions? Toogood (1989: 10) has an interesting proposal to give 2.5 cms. of water at a time, using a strategically placed can as a measure which, alas, would not help on sloping ground. Are brown branches with no leaves a sure sign of root death? Should nature be left to its own devices, hoping that green will overcome and brown be relegated to part of a thick mulch? Would it be more profitable to call it a day and uproot all those plants so affected?

As a postscript, and in the light of *Heathers 4* (2007), I should add that no 'foundling' came to any discernible harm this summer, and six were entered in a local exhibition in early September. Nor did the wild ling in the field next to our garden. As Johnson (1956: 19) reminds us (quoting Sir Herbert Maxwell),

heathers are xerophytic or drought-enduring race, but this summer suggests that even they might need more of a helping hand in future.

Does the Society's general guidance to growers need some tweaking in the light (pardon the pun) of these changes? Do we have to turn to the biochemist or even the DNA expert, to explain why there has been such variation of effect even in adjoining cultivars of the same species, let alone across species?

References

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Colin Rogers

Snippets

Here is a photo of a tub I planted up at the beginning of the village, with winter heathers.



It's still looking beautiful at the time of writing. Hopefully Carsethorn will see the beauty of heathers.

Allison Fitz-Earle

Our local Beamish open air museum has recently built an 1820's heather thatched cottage. These were quite common in the North East.



They have an excellent video:
<https://youtu.be/102U-EMEd3w>

David Plumridge

Publications

The following article appeared in 'The Journal' (Newcastle) on 20.02.2019 with a photo attached. Unfortunately I do not have a copy of the photo from the publication but I attached one for our amusement.

David Plumridge

Plant of the week

Erica carnea 'Myretoun Ruby'

This winter heather creates a lush magenta carpet due to its mat-forming and ruby urn-shaped flowers. Some heathers will only perform on acid soil, but this one, although its preference is acidic, will manage with neutral to somewhat alkaline soil too. Plant in full sunshine and moist soil.

Lightly clip after it flowers to stop it becoming straggly. Flowers last from December to March. The dark foliage remains attractive all year.



There follows a pleasing extract from the “Jobs for the Weekend” article published in the ‘I’ newspaper early in the year and written by Guy Barter, Chief Horticultural Adviser for the RHS. Recognition of heathers worth at last! Great to see in a national newspaper.

David Plumridge

The heather *Erica carnea* ‘Vivellii’, which flowers next month, is relished by bold insects from late winter and is an attractive buy for beds, borders and containers. Choose one with plenty of bud and not much flower – the flowers don’t last that long. Many will flower again in subsequent years.

Winter-flowering heathers

Heathers that flower in winter are especially valuable, not least because they don’t demand acid soil. *Erica carnea* f. *alba* ‘Springwood White’, grows vigorously to 40cm in width carrying abundant white flowers. *Erica carnea* ‘Vivellii’ flowers from next month on red tinged 15cm high foliage bearing purple-pink flowers, which are relished by bold insects braving wintery days and *Erica x darleyensis* ‘Kramer’s Red’, which is actually magenta, is 30cm in height with bronzed leaves.



World News

Donald Mackay passed away on 24th November 2018



Donald Mackay

1926 - 2018

The Society sadly announces the passing of Donald Mackay on 24th November 2018.

Donald Mackay joined the North American Heather Society (NAHS) in 1987. By March of 1988, “Dr. Donald Mackay” was listed on the *Heather News* masthead as “Northeast Editor” and contributed an article to that issue. Donald served as the northeast regional editor of *Heather News* in 1988 and 1989. He served as acting editor of the periodical from 1990 through most of 1994 and as the society’s official editor from then until the end of 2002. While he was editor, if not enough articles were submitted to fill an issue, Donald would write his own articles on a diverse assortment of topics having to do in any way, however small, with heathers. During some years, he wrote more than 40 articles.

After passing along the editorial red pen in 2003, Donald Mackay continued to write articles for *Heather News*. He was its most prolific and dependable author, submitting between two and six articles per year. His last article was published in the November/December 2018 issue of *Heather News Electronic*.

Donald served as NAHS president from 1990 through 1992 and again in 1999 and 2000. He also served for

many years in various offices of its Northeast Heather Society (NEHS) chapter and was vice-president of NEHS at the time of his death. He served as principal author of the NEHS publication *A Regional Heather Growing Guide*.

Soon after joining the NAHS, Donald became a member of The Heather Society (THS) and remained so until his passing. During that period, Donald corresponded regularly with members of the THS, attended at least two Conferences and contributed articles to the *Yearbook of The Heather Society* for no fewer than four editions.

Donald leaves a son and two daughters (his wife, Lottie, and a daughter pre-deceased him), nine grandchildren and his longtime companion, Elinor Cohen. The Heather Society extends our sympathy to them.

Ella May T. Wulff

Nursery Adverts



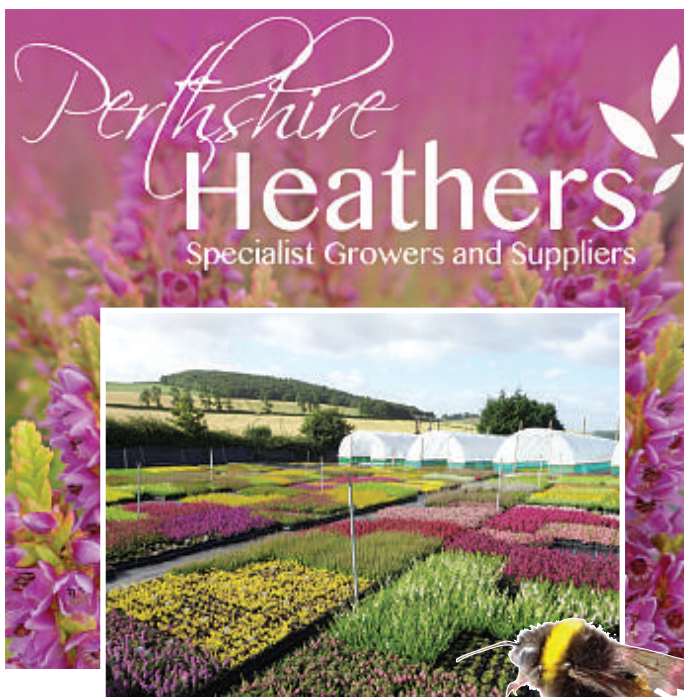
At the Arboretum des Grandes Bruyères we have 26 acres that comprise of a very large collection of heather and maintain the original *Calluna* of our forest. Obviously, we continue to augment the collection each year.

We offer a large collection of heathers and our visitors are impressed when we are surrounded by their beautiful flowers.

We have an experience of 50 years in cultivation and in our sandy soil *Erica x darleyensis* do very well and grow quite strongly. *E. vagans* also grow well even with our climate changes. *E. carnea* are slower in growth but soon take over the *Calluna*.

We would happily welcome any Heather Society member to come and visit us.





PERTSHIRE HEATHERS is a small family run horticultural nursery specialising in growing hardy Scottish grown heathers and heaths. We sell mainly wholesale and deliver free within a 50 mile radius. Open for retail by prior appointment. We grow top quality plants in 8cm, 1 litre and 2 litre pots and can usually supply varieties for all year round colour.

If you would like to arrange a visit please give me a call 07734 175937 or email me at irene@perthshireheathers.com



The Heather Garden

A retail division of Forest Edge Nurseries offering mail order and connoisseur's choice of over 400 varieties.

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If you have unwanted items such as books, catalogues, brochures that you would like to donate to The Heather Society send them to Forest Edge Nurseries, Woodlands, Wimborne, Dorset BH21 8LJ, where they will be stored and made available to members by request.