

The Heather Society Newsletter Summer 2019



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Diary 2019

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



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For contact details of the Society's Officers,
Editors, Group Organisers, see page 16
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Foreword

I would like to thank all the members who have contributed to this edition of the newsletter.
Front cover photos supplied by David Edge showing his display at RHS Hampton Court Palace Garden festival. See page 6 for more info.

Samantha Barnes

Chairman's Piece

Having recently subscribed to another specialist plant organisation I was disappointed to read of the problems and issues that parallel our own Heather Society (THS); members getting older and retiring, lack of new members, the inability to carry on the aims and objectives and local groups closing.

One cannot blame the younger generation for failing to take an interest in our Societies when other subjects focus their interest to a far greater extent providing a greater reward and satisfaction in the form of lifestyle knowledge gained and shared.

Regrettably the younger generation are often ignorant of the names of even our common flora and fauna and see little gain in being able to determine the difference between a blackbird and a thrush, let alone their nests or eggs, the identification of an oak or chestnut tree. Attempting to gain their interest generally in plants, let alone our own specialist topic is a proverbial uphill climb and possibly an unattainable quest.

So where we do go with THS? Looking at my membership of this new organisation I ask the question as to why I joined. The answer being that I anticipated that for my membership fee I would gain advantages that I could not get uniquely elsewhere.

Looking at our own THS position raises the question as to the future viability based solely on donations supporting the new (to be formed) Heather Society (HS).

With comprehensive information available to all, with computers, is there an incentive and advantage for an interested person to donate?

Currently the newsletter and the member's area of the THS website are the benefits provided on line or via hardcopy along with the AGM and invites to our remaining local group meetings.

To maintain financial viability in the future, and more importantly providing manpower (and woman power) to undertake the function of the HS, the aim will be to continue the provision of interest and benefit on an open basis that befits the calibre of our organisation.

David Edge

Society events & news

Arrangements for the 2019 AGM of The Heather Society

The 2019 AGM will be held at RHS Garden Harlow Carr on Saturday 14th September at 1:30pm

Programme for Saturday 14th September

10:00 Assemble at the entrance
10:30 Morning coffee
11:00 Guided Tour of the Garden
12:30 Lunch
13:30 AGM
14:30 Talk: "Harlow Carr Heathers" given by the Curator of the Garden, Paul Cook
15:30 Afternoon tea
16:30 Depart

The morning coffee, AGM, talk and afternoon tea will be held in the Jubilee Room in the Bramall Learning Centre within the Garden. Members should make their own arrangements for lunch. Catering at Harlow Carr is provided by Betty's Tea Rooms.

There are many visitor attractions in the area around RHS Garden 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)

Reminder

A letter has recently been mailed to all members and within is a proposal, by Council, that members should not renew their membership to The Heather Society (THS) after 31st December 2019. However, members will remain on the membership database until THS de-registration unless they request otherwise. Any monies received during 2020, to THS, will be treated as donations and will be included in the dispersal of funds. If you have not received the letter then contact the Hon. Secretary.

The Heather Society Website

Past, Present and Future

Past

The Heather Society's original website was designed by the late David Small and first released on April 16th 1997 on the Zetnet users' facility.

The website gave details of the Society, its publications and events, as well as heather garden design and planting guides. The main technical source was the *Handy Guide to Heathers*. David loaded a subset of the *Handy Guide* cultivar text into the website for members to view online. The entries selected were for those cultivars which had links to growers and gardens to view them.



Zetnet Services, based in the Shetland Islands, was one of the original Internet Service Providers (ISPs). In 2005 it was put into administration, but it continued to exist until 2009.

In 2001 David registered the website URL name www.heathersociety.org.uk and on February 4th 2001 the new website name was released using the same input as the original website. The original Zetnet website then pointed to the new website.



In 2003, recognising that the Society was a world-wide organisation, a new URL was registered www.heathersociety.org and on April 5th 2004, this became the master website with the **org.uk** site pointing to it.

This was done because of the collapse and takeover

of Zetnet. David also recognised the potential for someone else to control the more obvious names for The Heather Society website www.heathersociety.org.uk and www.heathersociety.org. By registering both these names, David retained control of the website for the Society. The .org name signifies a not-for-profit organisation, which The Heather Society is.

By this time David had made a number of changes and additions to the website, but the amount of information that needed to be uploaded and then maintained up-to-date became enormous. For example, a heather garden design function created by David and his son Ian, which was very popular, proved difficult to service with new cultivars and data about them.

The *Handy Guide* cultivar content had also undergone some changes. The number of specialist heather growers in the UK and elsewhere was rapidly diminishing, and keeping an up-to-date list of who was growing which cultivar had become impossible. Thus, this part of the cultivar listing was dropped, along with those cultivars believed to be no longer in existence.

The website continued to evolve under David's stewardship until he passed away in December 2010.

David's passing caused the Society to look at other sources to create and maintain the website. To this end, web designer Daniel Hutton, then based in Outwell close to the Society's Administrator, tendered for the task and was selected in early 2011. Charles Nelson took control of updating entries and adding new cultivars as appropriate. He was backed up by Alan Kay.

The opportunity was taken to modernise the website, but the garden design function, which already was no longer being maintained, was dropped. The cultivar list was condensed to reflect all those cultivars found in the *RHS Plant Finder* and new cultivar registrations from around the world.



Charles Nelson wrote a description of this version of the website. See **7-13 Heather Society Bulletin (summer 2011)**

Present

The website continued to be maintained by Charles Nelson, but a problem arose in 2014 with the registration of the two The Heather Society .org names. When David originally registered the names, he was the owner and pre-paid for them until 2014. In 2014, the names required to be re-registered under a new owner and I was asked to do this. As such, I currently own the names until 2026.

It also became apparent that as website technology moved on, the website needed an overhaul to allow those with touch-screen devices, mobile phones, tablets, etc., to view it and navigate the pages. Coincidentally, administrative issues with The Heather Society were also becoming apparent and necessitated changes.

- Some members wanted to pay via credit card, but the manual system in use was redundant and expensive to operate.
- There was a lot of information, like past Yearbooks and Bulletins, which new members had no access to as hard copy versions were depleted.
- The membership database needed to be updated.
- As membership numbers declined, the cost of postage of the Bulletins and Yearbooks was becoming prohibitive and the Society was not able to cover the costs. The Society was losing money even though membership fees were increased.

To resolve these issues the Society commissioned a new look website from Daniel Hutton, which went live on March 25th 2015. The work was paid for through the legacy left to the Society by Bob Rope.



The new website allowed touch-screen operation, online membership access to old documents, and online joining and fee payment via PayPal. An online membership database was created to facilitate these functions as part of the website. No financial data is held, only names, addresses, email ID, etc., which can be updated online as required. The system is also compatible with the current EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

The basic operation of the website is similar to the old version with the slider replaced by sets of 3 sliding images, selectable by clicking one of the six buttons below the image area. The top six buttons are drop-down menus to enable access to:-

- **Home:** front page, with description of the Society, news updates for members (top right), Heather of the Month etc.
- **About Us:** Council, donations, etc.
- **News:** Society events, Heather of the Month, New Heathers registered, Announcements, etc.
- **Heathers:** cultivar listings, FAQs, colour chart, gardens, nurseries, etc.
- **Members:** the members-only area to log in, join the Society, latest Bulletins, Yearbooks, find past documents, AGM documents, etc.
- **Contact:** how to contact the Society

The Members area is accessed via the logon function in the Members button. Your registered email ID and password are used to gain access. Once logged in, you can change any of your personal information held, including your password, from the left side of the logged-in panel.

All of the past Bulletins and Yearbooks were added to the Members area as PDF files. More recently, the Society paid for the entire 8 parts of the *International Register of Heather Names* (IRHN) to be scanned and it is now available online as searchable PDF's. Together with the supplements to the IRHN, all published scientific and horticultural names (and their variants and errors) in the genera *Andromeda*, *Calluna*, *Daboecia* and *Erica* (including *Bruckenthalia* and other minor genera formerly recognised) can now be found on the website (estimated at 25,000 separate entries).

The current cultivar lists are being expanded and updated with images I have taken during visits to various gardens, nurseries, etc., together with images scanned from The Heather Society slide library, with help from the late Jean Preston with the slide captions. The text content is also expanded with information previously held in the IRHN and offline cultivar databases. This is to make the content more interesting with information such as who registered the cultivar, when, where the name came from, etc. As new cultivars are registered, they are added to the cultivar lists, with images. This is an ongoing task as time and opportunity permits.

Any new images of fully and correctly named heather cultivars are always welcome.

The website has now become the main delivery mechanism for new documents from the Society, including the electronic edition of the newsletter, Annual Reports and AGM notifications. Members can access these via the Members drop-down button after logging in.

The top right hand area of the home page contains links to new items added, like newsletter releases.

Future

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 and I have agreed to keep it running until at least then as my contribution to the Society.

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.

There are a number of areas to be improved and enhanced:-

- The Home page is somewhat too large and things like Heather of the Month get lost.

- The News updates area needs to be expanded on the Home page.
- The cultivar listings need simplification.
- A cultivar search function, resembling the original website function is needed.
- An expanded interactive Q&A area.

I am sure there will be other changes as new ideas develop, but the website will remain as a constant in a changing world.

I am always open to ideas, so please feel free to contact me.

David Brown
Webmaster

Acknowledgements

The late David Small: creating the original website, without which the current website may not exist.

Charles Nelson: taking over from David to administer the website, provide the technical integrity of the cultivar data and editorial help with this article.

Daniel Hutton: continued technical support for the website design and hosting.

The late Jean Preston: slide library images of so many older cultivars.

Phil Joyner: historical dates from the archives and help proofing the text.

RHS Hampton Court 2019

The application to stage an exhibit in the Floral Marque has to be submitted in the late Summer of the previous year. This requires forethought and a degree of luck in the planning of a stand, forethought as to the plants that are to be exhibited and luck that the seasonal weather will enable them to be at their peak flowering.

The aim of the stand is to display a range of varieties and colour alongside an educational aspect, providing initiatives in the way, positions and situations that heathers can be utilised in the garden and landscape.

Despite our reservations this year we managed to find *Daboecia*, *Erica cinerea* and *Erica tetralix* with flower along with a selection of foliage varieties to add colour.

The stand takes two days to set up, one day taking the 'hard' stand materials in the form of the backing, trays and crates followed by a further trip with the show plants.

Taking into account the judge's previous comment regarding the display of smaller plants we have evolved the concept of growing two or three years in advance a group of heathers in a larger cut down container giving the impression of a larger and more mature planting.

The majority of the questions asked refer to planting in clay soils (being near London) planting in the shade, especially under trees, pruning and planting. The show was well attended this year with better weather conditions and less competition from world wide sports events, we received many complimentary comments regarding the display and it was rewarded with a Silver Gilt Medal.

My thanks go to the stalwart Heather Society members who helped with manning the stand and answering the diverse questions posed by the public, supplying over 600 leaflets providing information regarding heathers and the Society. Special thanks also to Trish Hardy, my partner and manager on the nursery who devotes so much time and attention to the display, without her input and dedication it would not happen!



Above: two additional photos showing the display at RHS Hampton Court Palace Garden festival 2019.

David Edge

Group News

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

Home Counties

RHS Wisley Garden: 7th September 2019

Meeting 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 <https://www.rhs.org.uk/gardens/wisley/rhs-garden-wisley-flower-show>

David Edge will however, not have a stand at the show. Nevertheless I hope members will turn up to view the heather collection.

Barry Sellers

North East Group

As I put pen to paper, the weather is perfect, a real summers day.

The winter heathers showed great colour, particularly one which is nearest the window as neither Geoff nor I can walk any distance being 93 and 90, hence two gardeners who keep the garden tidy and I have help in the house.

How good it would be if the gardening programmes on tv would promote heathers and encourage their cultivation.

Hoping those of you who can, have a good gardening summer.

Dorothy M Warner

Erica x mercatoris new name for novel hybrid heath

Erica x mercatoris has been published (The Plantsman 18 (2): 60–62, June 2019) for seedlings raised from *E. spiculifolia* (Balkan heath, formerly *Bruckenthalia spiculifolia*) crossed with *E. manipuliflora* (whorled heath). These are in commercial production in Germany as “annual” pot-plants.

According to Kurt Kramer who made the cross in 2004 and who selected clones for propagation and naming, ‘Pamela’ and ‘Lisette’ are grown in significant quantities (about 50,000 plants per annum).

They do not appear to be in British or North American markets and are almost unknown in permanent plantings in public or private gardens here. Both were grown out-of-doors in our garden in East Anglia for five years, along with another clone. They flourished, producing plenty of leafy shoots although flowering was sparse and rather erratic, until ‘Lisette’ and ‘Pamela’ perished in the hot, dry summer of 2018.

04–59–6 is still alive (July 2019) and I have named it ‘Glockenspiel’. Kurt Kramer wrote about ‘Pamela’ and ‘Lisette’ and illustrated them in the Summer 2017 Newsletter pp 10–11 (<<https://www.heathersociety.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/2017-02-Heather-Society-newsletter-summer-2017-final-web.pdf>>).

Like *Erica spiculifolia* and *E. x gaudifans*, these produce apical racemes composed of small flowers. In East Anglia, the plants were outdoors all year, without any protection even in periods of severe frost and snow. Pruning was not undertaken regularly, and was never severe: at most, the old flower spikes were nipped away. All three clones were evidently lime-tolerant – they grew in gravel-cum-builder’s rubble at the edge of the driveway.

The hybrid’s name is derived from “Kramer” which means a merchant, retailer or shopkeeper: mercator is the same in Latin. So, the epithet recognizes Kurt Kramer’s unique contribution to the breeding hardy heathers.

‘Glockenspiel’ (registered cultivar name no. DME 2018–05: seedling no. 04–59–6) has rose-pink (H7) to heliotrope (H12) flowers. This name is chosen as the German equivalent of carillon, a musical instrument comprising a collection of at least 23 bells, an allusion to the racemes of flowers (bells).

E. Charles Nelson

Holehird Gardens

Windermere, Cumbria.

I work as a volunteer gardener at Holehird Gardens in Cumbria.

Our fame is primarily for our National Collection of *Daboecia* but the Gardens also have a large collection of summer flowering *Ericas* and *Calluna vulgaris* as well as many winter flowering *Erica carnea* and *E. x darleyensis*.

Many of our winter heathers had outstayed their welcome in that they were over 25 years old and so this year, trying to imitate what has recently been achieved at RHS Wisley, we have replaced many of these old winter heathers in two of our beds with new cultivars.

We have two more beds to plant up this Autumn with winter heathers as a result of a grant given to us by the Heather Society. This will complete the overhaul of winter flowering heathers at Holehird.

Below are two photos which show the completed bed. Although the plants are small at present, we are looking forward to brilliant displays in a couple of years.



Valerie R. Jeffreys

My favourite heather

My Favourite heather is not one of the many found by heather hunters or breeders who work to find cultivars or varieties, in spite of the the many superb plants this has resulted in. My favourite are those growing in the wild. Having been a member of THS since 1977, this has given me many opportunities to see multiple localities of different species. Showing me where they thrive and where they struggle. For this I have great gratitude to the Society. The only missing trip for me, was the one to see a place where *Erica carnea* are native. *Erica carneas* are one of the easiest heathers to grow but will they be on the invaders list soon? As part of my journey I went to Austria on my own early in the 90's, however the trip would have been so much nicer with the company of heather friends!

In our often very green, dull and humid gardens here on the west coast of Norway the sight of a pure white summer flowering heather is a delight and *Erica mackayana* 'Shining Light' would represent them very well. This is currently my favourite heather.



Eileen Petterssen

An interesting observation.

My front garden is long, and a shade thin, and at the North end, I had devised a ring style bed bordered by the shaped pavings, to provide a neat circle about seven feet outside diameter. Placing *Erica erigena* 'Irish Silver' at the centre, I surrounded it with a ring of *E. carnea* 'Anne Sparkes'. It seemed reasonably successful, but *E. erigena* 'Irish Silver' was grudging, and I replaced it with *E. erigena* 'Irish Dusk' which cured the matter, although I must confess, that currently, at least half of the *E. carnea* 'Anne Sparkes' have been replaced by *E. carnea* 'Bells Extra Special'.

It was clear, to balance the matter, a similar circular bed should be erected at the South end of the lawn. Accordingly, to commemorate the sad loss of our friend Bert Jones, I paved a slightly smaller ring, and dedicated it to his memory. Diane Jones was kind enough to supply three *E. x griffithsii* 'Jacqueline' which I planted in November 1998.

In spite of being partially shaded by an enormous *Chamaecyparis lawsoniana* 'Elwoodii' the bed had thrived splendidly. During a couple of periods of heart problems this bed has received virtually no trimming, and last summer it had become an absolute monster, and although it was a grand sight, but about eight feet diameter, close examination revealed it was unacceptably "leggy", and would have to be cropped.

Long and earnest conversations with both John Griffiths, and David Edge determined the position. Either I cropped down to a few inches, and wait for it to sprout again, or replace it with, say, two litre pots, and hope for the best. Being now 95 years my impatience settled the matter, and I had to call in contractors to remove it. Unfortunately, I was unable to get replacements, and settled for three one litre *E. vagans* 'Mrs D F Maxwell'.

Now we come to the interesting bit. In preparing the ground for the newcomers, I came across a root of *E. x griffithsii* 'Jacqueline' about two or more fingers thick, that the contractor saw fit to leave as it would not show. However, emerging from this piece of hardwood was certainly the start of a shoot, which shows this cultivar will resist excessive mutilation, yet survive and rebuild. The replacement *E. vagans* 'Mrs D F Maxwell', which were planted early this year, are doing splendidly, and are already a foot tall, and covered in buds.

The photograph enclosed shows the *E. x griffithsii* 'Jacqueline' as it stood, awaiting that fateful decision.



John Plowman

The Heather Garden at Maelog, Ferryside, Carmarthenshire

The heather garden at Maelog was laid out in 2005 the year after we relocated from Sussex when we retired.

The entire garden covers about half an acre and is located on a steep hillside at an incline of 45 degrees and overlooks the Towy Estuary and Llan Stefan beyond.

The garden was laid out in terraces by the previous owners in 1994 and comprised mixed shrubs and perennials. What is now the heather bed was a mixture of shrubs and crocosmia covering an area of 50 metres long by 3 metres wide and had at one time contained a conifer hedge but only the rotten roots of the conifers were now apparent.

Given we were in our early energetic sixties we were eager to reduce the labour intensity of the garden given our energy was certainly going to decline over time. This was a major consideration when we decided to lay out the heather bed which is at the top of the garden.

We retained two local gardeners to clear out the old in preparation for the heathers and they cleared out 20 tons of shrubs, roots, and crocosmia corms and this revealed a soil that was variable but mainly friable except for a central part which contained more clay than we would've preferred but not a 'game changer' we felt.

We consulted the literature and found Geoffrey Yates' and the Proudley's books valuable and Adrian Bloom's book on growing conifers and heathers in unfavourable places.

The soil pH was in the upper sixies, not ideal we thought so we distributed much sulphur pellets and powder as recommended by Bloom.

We then sought expert advice in the form of Nigel Sheldon who ran Wrenvale Nurseries in Gwaun Cae Gurwen who specialised in heathers and so bought just under a thousand plants recommended by Nigel.

These comprised:

Erica vagans - 'Mrs D F Maxwell'; 'Lyonesse'

E. carnea - 'Foxhollow'; 'Golden Starlet'

E. cinerea - 'Katinka'; 'Alba Minor'; 'Stephen Davies'; 'C D Eason'

E. x watsonii - 'H Maxwell'; 'Dawn'

At either end of the bed where we thought the conditions for heathers was too unfavourable we planted Yakushimanum Rhododendrons recommended by Mr Loder of Lenardslee Gardens in Sussex.

With the exception of the *E. cinerea* the heathers have been a great success.

Alas the beautiful deep red *E. cinerea* 'Katinka' suffered the most and only two or three plants at the bottom of the sloping bed have thrived and the others we replaced by other successful species. All those planted in the central part of the bed with the heavier soil struggled until we planted miniature conifers among them largely to prevent soil erosion from the steep sloping bed but this seemed to encourage some of the struggling heathers that now show well.

It's satisfying that the garden is much admired during the garden crawl, a village event in support of the local life boat with comments such as 'amazing' and 'really beautiful.'

Maintenance is minimal with the annual trim in March and the occasional weed to be extracted neither of which is demanding. Rarely can a plant offer so much beauty and pleasure for so little effort.

The garden in front of the house runs down to a dry stone retaining wall and the bed above the wall is covered with *E. carnea* 'Foxhollow'.

These were planted amongst 'blue' low spreading junipers to create a blue/yellow contrast with the *E. carnea* 'Foxhollow' but although the *E. carnea* 'Foxhollow' has thrived the junipers suffered an obscure disease identified by the RHS and had to be disposed of.

The man from the ministry who came to examine the diseased junipers commented, "I expected it would be a nice garden given you are RHS members but nothing like this"

Now the heather bed is near fifteen years old and that I believe is regarded as the life time of heathers. Is that true? They still continue to be admired but where do we go from here?



Richard Leveton

Maelog

Ferryside

Carmarthenshire SA175RS

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

Heather plants and their cleansing properties

The heather plant, is a shrub that is found across Europe, Russia, and also North America. The thistles and bark serve a variety of purposes. The plant is also highly medicinal, and for generations many cultures have been chopping up the leaves and petals of the flower and preparing potent teas.

Heather tea benefits a variety of functions in the body, and is an excellent way of cleansing toxins from organs and relieving inflammatory pains.

Heather tea benefits are provided by the active ingredients, which include types of quercetin, dihydroxychromone, flavonoids and tannin.

Heather tea has likely been utilized for medicinal purposes for hundreds, if not thousands, of years. The tea has been reported to alleviate certain inflammatory conditions, such as arthritis, while also improving symptoms of gout and cystitis. It wasn't until the modern age that researchers could more accurately pinpoint the therapeutic properties of the plant, and determine additional uses as a natural health therapy.

The benefits most widely recognized are its effects as a bladder and gastrointestinal cleanser. From the treatment of bladder, kidney, and liver infections to the potential natural removal of parasites, heather tea has a strong cleansing effect on the body.

Upon the onset of such an infection, it's recommended to take three cups of heather tea per day until the infection goes away. Heather tea may not only slow the progression of such infections, but also assist with overall bodily health by helping to remove the buildup of toxins in various organs, therefore potentially preventing other diseases.

These detoxification properties have made heather tea into a favorite among natural health experts who specialize in colonic cleansing. However, be cautious about taking excess amounts of the tea.

In fact, it's only recommended to drink heather tea during the course of an infection, as excessive use is known to cause side effects, including potential liver damage.

If you are taking other medications, especially drugs

related to the urinary and gastro intestinal tract, then it's especially important that you speak to a doctor familiar with natural health practices for expert guidance before beginning treatment.

A day in the park!

I recently visited Perth Riverside gardens to commemorate the 5th year of Julian's passing. I have below a selection of photos from my visit.





Allison Fitz-Earle

World News

Philomath Frolickings

WILL YE GO, LASSIE?

Scots or Scots' descendants who now live far from the mother country may get a bit melancholy when they hear the lyrics of *Wild Mountain Thyme*, but its admonition to "pluck wild mountain thyme all around the blooming heather" offers a tip for heather gardeners. Although I am from sad experience leery of most creeping thymes as too aggressive to be companionable with heathers in my garden, at least one cultivar of *Thymus serpyllum* has proven to be a wonderful ground cover and filler. I originally knew this cultivar as *Thymus serpyllum* 'Minimalist', but that name now is listed in the RHS Plant Finder as a synonym of 'Minor', so 'Minor' it is. *Thymus serpyllum* 'Minor' is the tiniest of thymes. Maybe there is a smaller, but it is not in my repertoire.

Most of my plants should undoubtedly no longer be called either of those cultivar names, except as a "strain", because they have seeded freely in the heather garden while remaining so low and slowly creeping as to never be considered pests. I am unable to distinguish the seedlings from my original purchased plant.

Thymus serpyllum 'Minor' plants are as tight growing as can be, less than an inch high except in flower, when they might get to two inches. The tiny leaves have the usual thyme scent, released when the plants are stepped on (which doesn't seem to bother them), and the flowers smother the plants in early summer before most *Calluna vulgaris* flower.

I originally planted *Thymus serpyllum* 'Minor' to cover bare ground between young heather plants. As my garden has aged and some heathers have suffered from inadequate watering, especially those competing with aggressive tree roots, the thyme has proven increasingly valuable. Ground covered with thyme is much less likely to either lose water through evaporation or shed rain or sprinkler water than is bare ground or ground covered with bark mulch, my mulch of choice for the heather garden. Even better, if I cut off a dead or nearly dead heather plant at ground level, the little thyme will soon hide the woody stubs with its dainty leaves and beautiful flowers.

Of course, creeping thyme will also creep across and hide steppingstones. Keeping it trimmed off the stones, doing a little weeding (it makes a dandy nursery for self-sown heather seedlings), and lifting the occasional plug to give away or plant in another part of the garden are the only chores involved in maintaining this beautiful garden helper and delightful heather companion. I wouldn't be without it. And did I mention that it was in full boom this year on the weekend of the Philomath Frolic and Rodeo?



Minor Daboecia: *Thymus serpyllum* 'Minor' surrounds a *Daboecia* seedling. Note tiny leaves of the thyme. Photo by Barry Wulff.



Minor Curled Roundstone: *Erica tetralix* 'Curled Roundstone' (top) and *Thymus serpyllum* 'Minor'. Photo by Barry Wulff.

Ella May T. Wulff

2299 Wooded Knolls Drive, Philomath, Oregon
97370 USA ewulff@peak.org

Starting a Heather garden in Ohio

I didn't know all that much about heaths and heathers before I started to gain an interest in these fascinating and beguiling plants.

My wife Jenniviere and I had just moved closer to our workplaces and had just purchased a new home. The house was built over 30 years ago but the original landscaping plans were saved.

On these original plans heaths and heathers were listed but there was no evidence of their having been planted or if they were they had long since disappeared. I had not seen any of these plants before in any place I have lived in Ohio and other states where I have lived.

Changes were needed to our gardens because of some neglect by the previous owners. English ivy had overrun many of the garden areas especially in the front of the house. I decided to plant heaths and heathers after reading more about the plants on The Heather Society and Northeast Heather Society pages and archives.

We moved in, in late 2017 and I started planting a few *Erica x darleyensis* I found locally in the spring of 2018. After this I expanded the garden in late September in October of last year and planted mix of *Calluna vulgaris* and *Ericas*.

After tearing out the ivy I had to amend the soil as our native soil here along the shore of Lake Erie east of Cleveland is predominantly yellow glacial clay. The soil had been altered before so the PH was tested at 6.5-7.0 generally. I added peat, sand, and a special garden mix soil with Espoma soil acidifier.

We planted about 40 plants altogether before fall turned cold abruptly in late October. We are a few miles from the lake so this helps to moderate temperatures especially in the fall as compared to a few miles inland. It also helps to moderate and compress temperature swings in the spring and summer.

We normally experience "lake effect" snows forming over Lake Erie and also Lake Huron at times. Snowfall averages 80-100 inches per year. Last winter was cold at times with the coldest reading being -7 (-21.6 C). The snowfall was inconsistent over the past winter and the plants were not covered by an insulating blanket of snow at all times. I had read that this was the ideal situation for heaths and heathers in our


climate although our Zone 6b is not as extreme as other areas of our Northeast and Midwest.


I am happy to report that just about all the plants made it through the winter very well with only one casualty being an *E. x darlyenesis*. Varieties planted included *E. x darlyensis*, *E. vagans*, *E. tetralix*, *E. carnea*, and *E. cinerea*. The *E. cinerea* looked damaged emerging from winter but have recovered well and have been blooming in the late spring and summer.




Paul Homitz-Daniels



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The pictures show plantings at Christmas time with season's decoration or combinations of the Sunset-Girls® with the winter/ spring-flowering *Erica carnea* or *Erica x darleyensis*.

The *Erica* species even bring the additional advantage in pre-spring to be the first food source for pollinating insects.



Above Sunset-Girls trio



Above Sunset-Girls with *Erica carnea*



Above Sunset-Girls with *Calluna vulgaris* 'Zilly'

Rudolf Sterkel

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