



# HeatherDrift

news and information from the  
Vancouver Island Heather Society

Issue #20

Winter-Spring 2010

## About our Society

The Vancouver Island Heather Society (VIHS) links heather enthusiasts on Vancouver Island and provides opportunities for them to meet and share experiences with other heather gardeners, and to learn more about heathers and their companion plants. We meet monthly for study sessions or garden visits.

## How to join VIHS

Membership dues, \$10/year (cheques payable to Vancouver Island Heather Society), can be mailed to Sharon Martin, VIHS Treasurer, PO Box 82, Duncan, BC, Canada V9L 3X1. For additional information contact Membership chair, Willie McDermot-Bruce at 250-743-5312 or <wmb@shaw.ca>.

## Society Information

President Heather Schyf can be contacted at <schyfeh@telus.net> or 250-743-4173.

VIHS publishes its newsletter *HeatherDrift* twice annually. Contact Editor Joyce Prothero at <jprothero@saltspring.com> or phone 250-537-9215.

Information about VIHS can also be found on the VIHS website [www.bcheathersociety.org](http://www.bcheathersociety.org) or via links to VIHS on the NAHS website, [www.northamericanheathersoc.org](http://www.northamericanheathersoc.org).

## Heathers and Heaths are Ideal Plants for our Gardens

Elaine Scott, Vancouver Island Heather Society

I was first introduced to heathers and heaths about ten years ago. Since then, I cannot brag enough about this wonderful, deer-resistant plant group.

So, why am I so keen on heathers and heaths for our gardens? There are several reasons. First, they show year-round colour both from the flowers and the foliage. Second, they are evergreen, hardy, require little maintenance, and withstand salt spray. Finally, heathers have wonderful groundcover qualities and are relatively free from pests and disease.

**Environmental requirements.** All heaths and heathers prefer lime-free, well-drained, well cultivated soil, and at least four hours of direct sun daily. To prepare

soil for heathers use a light, workable planting mix with peat moss, leaf mould or garden compost. Do not use manures; they are too rich. Heathers will not survive drying out and will not tolerate boggy areas.

**How to Plant.** Then read the heather label so you know the mature width of the plant. While you are preparing the soil and planting hole, put the heathers in a bucket of water to soak the roots. This knowledge helps you to plant the new plants with adequate space to grow. Dig a

## Spring Sale of Heather

March 27, 2010, Farmer's Institute Hall, Cobble Hill

The Vancouver Island Heather Society will be holding its 2010 Spring Sale on Saturday, March 27<sup>th</sup> at the Farmer's Institute Hall in Cobble Hill. The doors will open at 9:30 am and the sale will begin at 10am. Be there early to get the best selection. The sale will finish at noon or when sold out.

There will be an excellent selection of winter- and summer-blooming heaths, summer-blooming heathers with winter coloured foliage or spring tips, summer-blooming Irish heathers, and tree heaths. Also on sale will be planter arrangements and an interesting selection of 10-plant starter kits with planting diagrams. Demonstrations on planting, pruning and flower arranging will take place. Members of the Society will be on hand to help you with your selections.

(More information on the final page)

planting hole twice the size of the root ball. Partially fill this hole with non-limey compost or topsoil. To encourage the plant to establish more quickly score or lightly scratch the root ball. Plant heathers to a depth so that the lower foliage is resting on the ground. After they are planted and well watered, top the soil with 2" of pulverized bark. This will make subsequent weeding easier.

Care after Planting. During hot weather water deeply at least once a week. Annual pruning of the upright-growing summer-blooming varieties (*Calluna vulgaris*) prevents them from becoming leggy and out of control. In late February or early March, before the new growth starts, you should prune back these heathers below the spent blooms. However, if you prune them in early fall you will enhance the display of the tip colours that appear on some varieties.

Another type of heather that requires pruning is *Daboecia cantabrica*, the Irish heather. This species

and its hybrids may go into winter looking untidy; if this "look" bothers you, cut off the spent flower stems in late fall. Leave the serious pruning until spring. *Daboecia* can tolerate severe pruning.

Winter-blooming heather varieties are pruned to keep plants bushy, well-shaped and improve flowering. Annual pruning is not always necessary. If you feel that your winter-flowering heathers could do with pruning, the best time is after they have finished flowering.

Heathers do not need fertilizing because it may make them grow too quickly. The result is plants that are quite woody in the middle.

Elaine Scott is a Master Gardener, plant propagator, and the Plant Sale czar for VIHS. She maintains a large ornamental garden that features both heathers and ornamental grasses. *Ed.*

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## Ornamental Grasses: Ideal Companion Plants for Heather

For increasing the yearlong interest of the heather landscape with additional form, texture, scale, colour, and movement, many heather enthusiasts incorporate ornamental grasses into their gardens. Although they might be familiar with heather-pruning (see above), heather growers sometimes agonize over the when-and-how of caring for ornamental grasses.

Help came our way last October, while on an chapter outing to visit The Heather Farm of David and Irene Wilson in Chilliwack. Afterwards, many of us visited a grass nursery in the Chilliwack area where owner Ewan MacKenzie answered many of our grass-care questions. The following information comes from Ewan's excellent handout which distinguishes the characteristics and care of *Cool-Season Grasses* versus *Warm-Season Grasses*.

### Cool-Season Grasses:

#### Characteristics:

- actively grow between zero and mid-20s°C
- are mostly evergreen (+ a few deciduous)
- are mostly low-growers (up to 24" high)
- flower mostly late winter to early summer

#### Growing Guidelines:

- remove old dead foliage by "raking" with fine lawn rake, course comb, or rubber-gloved fingers
- for best results, divide every 2-3 years, just as new growth starts

#### General Information:

- Don't plant too deep – keep same level as in container – and avoid mulching the crown of the plant.
- Don't over fertilize. Most ornamental grasses require little if no additional fertilizer
- Deer resistance. If deer eat your plants, consider planting *Festuca*, *Miscanthus* and *Pennisetum* varieties.
- Use as cut flowers. Cut before flower has fully opened; will last in water 1-2 weeks; then drain and dry.

### Warm-Season Grasses:

#### Characteristics:

- need warm soil conditions to begin growing
- grow best over 24°C
- die back in fall to sub-surface dormant buds
- most luminous range of foliage and flowers
- are mostly taller grasses (2-8', even to 15')
- flower from mid-summer to first frost

#### Growing Guidelines:

- cut back to ground after first killing frosts OR leave the dried foliage for winter interest and cut back by ½-¾ of height just as new growth begins (March - early April)
- divide every 3-5 years, early spring, to avoid die-out in the centre

## VIHS Activities: Remembering 2009

Our meetings this year included field trips to gardens and nurseries as well as an educational meeting at the Mill Bay Masonic Hall.

**February.** We braved the winter weather and toured the Ellen Norris Heather Garden and the Winter Garden at Glendale Gardens and Woodland. Also, we made a stop at the nearby Cannor Nursery; Jeff de Jong, the nursery manager (and the new director of the Master Gardner's program at Glendale Gardens), told us about Cannor's plans to stock small ornamental trees. Mr. de Jong also hosts a two hour gardening program on the radio each weekend.

**March.** This was a busy month. Our March meeting was held as an evening meeting to allow working members to participate. Elaine Scott presented a well-received talk on "Using Heathers in Your Garden." Also, we had a booth at the Nanaimo Garden Show in mid-March and held our annual Heather Sale later in the month, both very successful. Thanks to Elaine Scott and all her helpers for organizing the sale.

**April.** At our meeting we had a tubie test, with a discussion of the results led by Joyce Prothero. Norma Dirom reported on the new VIHS aprons, designed and produced by our club to replace our rather worn VIHS shirts to be worn at our heather sales and other events.

**May.** Heather Schyf organized a trip to Lake Cowichan to view native plants. Those who attended found some real treasures.

**June.** For our annual Salt Spring Island Expedition we visited the iris garden of Ted Baker – many members couldn't resist

ordering some of the beautiful cultivars – and toured the new additions to Joyce Prothero's garden. Many stopped at Thimble Nursery on their way home.

**September.** The meeting included a tubie test – we were fortunate to have David Wilson to lead the discussion – and a plant exchange and sale with the proceeds going to Seeds for Malawi.

**October.** This meeting took the form of an outing on the BC mainland. At our first stop, The Heather Farm in Sardis, David Wilson showed us the gardens and gave us a tour of his production areas. Irene Wilson had a tempting supply of special heathers; a number of purchases took place and the cars started to fill up. The final destination on the way home was at a nursery specializing in ornamental grasses. We thank Judith Gilley for arranging that special visit.

**November.** This meeting included our AGM with its reports and the election of officers for 2010. The program featured the first of a two-part series on *The Other Ericas* by Michael Krieger. As he explained, we all are quite familiar with *Erica carnea* and *E. x darleyensis*, but there are a number of other *Erica* species and hybrids which thrive in our Vancouver Island climate. [For an illustrated version of Michael's two-part talk, see pages 5 and 6 of this publication.]

*The preceding review of activities was adapted from President Michael Krieger's annual report which was presented at the November 2009 AGM. The conclusion of his report appears below. Ed.*

I believe it takes a special group of people to join a club dedicated to the study and enjoyment of Heathers. Many members contribute extra time to our club to make it successful. At a time when many garden clubs find their membership shrinking, ours has maintained its membership. I believe this is due to the warm nature of those who enjoy heather. It has been a pleasure to serve as president for the last three years. During that time we successfully hosted the 2008 World Congress of Heather in Victoria, BC. Thank you to all the board officers, board members, committee members, chapter members – everyone who has participated.

*Michael Krieger, President*

## VIHS Activities: Anticipating 2010

VIHS meets on the first Wednesday of each month except in July, August and January. The meetings planned for 2010 include a mixture of educational meetings, field trips to gardens and nurseries, and our traditional December luncheon. An elective ongoing activity is the planting/maintenance of selected heather gardens. The following outline represents the current status of our planning for activities during 2010.

**February 3, Mill Bay Masonic Hall, 2pm.** We met to plan our 2010 meeting schedule and hear the second installment of Michael Krieger's talk on "The Other Ericas." We also critiqued our poster displays, selected library books to review and report on at the March meeting. A meeting of the Heather Sale Committee preceded the monthly membership meeting.

**March 3, Mill Bay Masonic Hall, 2pm,** We will hold a tubie test, continue critiquing the poster displays and, to encourage more borrowing, review some of the books in the VIHS library.

Classes for the Tubie Test:

Class 1: Any *Erica carnea*, in flower, one to three stems, all from the same plant, judged for flowers

Class 2: Any *Erica x darleyensis*, in flower, one to three stems, all from the same plant, judged for flowers

Class 3: Any heath or heather, non-flowering, one to three stems, all from the same plant, judged for foliage effect.

**March 12-14, Booth, Nanimo Garden Show.**

**March 13, Glendale Gardens and Woodland, 9-noon.** Pre-Sale workshop presented by Elaine

Scott at 9am, with other VIHS members assisting with the Heather Sale from 10am to noon.

**March 27, Heather Sale, Farmers' Institute Hall, Cobble Hill.** More details are available elsewhere in this publication.

**April 7.** Outing to a rhodo and other nursery in the Saanich area.

**May 5.** Outing to Yellow Point Cranberry and Hazelnut Farms, Linda Yemen coordinating.

**June 1 (Tuesday).** Annual outing to Salt Spring Island. Plans include visiting The Bamboo Farm and Thimble Nursery with a brownbag lunch/meeting at Joyce Prothero's.

**July and August.** No meetings planned. Elaine Scott to coordinate the watering schedule for the Dan Cooke Memorial Garden.

**September 8.** Tour of Michael Krieger's garden in Mahlahat with an on-site discussion of various types of heathers (size, blooming season, etc.)

**October 6.** An evening meeting on "Glorious Grasses" with speaker Ewan MacKenzie, owner of Exemplar Horticulture, Chilliwack. Also, a sale of grasses and heathers. Coordinators: Norma Dirom and Judith Gilley. Save the date! More info TBA.

**November 3, Mill Bay Masonic Hall, 2pm.** AGM plus program TBA.

**December 1, 11:30am.** Holiday Lunch, TBA.

## The Who's Who of VIHS

Recent elections have resulted in the following Board for 2010: *President*, Heather Schyf; *Past President*, Michael Krieger; *Vice President*, Linda Yemen; *Secretary*, Marilyn Day; *Treasurer*, Sharon Martin; *Directors-at-Large*: Willie McDermot-Bruce, Joyce Prothero, Doreen Wheeldon, Sheila Yaremko.

In addition, VIHS members have assumed the following responsibilities for VIHS activities, services and

representation: *BC Council of Garden Clubs (representative)*, David Wilson; *Ellen Norris Trust Fund Committee (chair)*, Norma Dirom; *Heather Drift (editor)*, Joyce Prothero; *Heather Sales (coordinator)*, Elaine Scott; *Library*, Sheila Yaremko; *Membership*, Willie McDermot-Bruce; *NAHS Board (VIHS representative)*, Heather Schyf; *Refreshments for VIHS meetings*, Mabel Ferguson; *Webmaster*, Margo Johnston.

For current information on VIHS activities, visit [bcheathersociety.org](http://bcheathersociety.org) or contact VIHS President Heather Schyf at 250-743-4173 or [schyfeh@telus.net](mailto:schyfeh@telus.net).

# The “Other” Ericas

## Michael Krieger, VIHS Member

When I first joined the Vancouver Island Heather Society I was introduced to the varieties of Heather which are commonly available at our southern Vancouver Island plant nurseries. Soon, *Erica carnea* and *Erica x darleyensis* were amongst the names that I recognized. Since then I have come to realize that there a number of “other” Ericas which grow in my garden and have some characteristics which make them worthwhile for consideration.

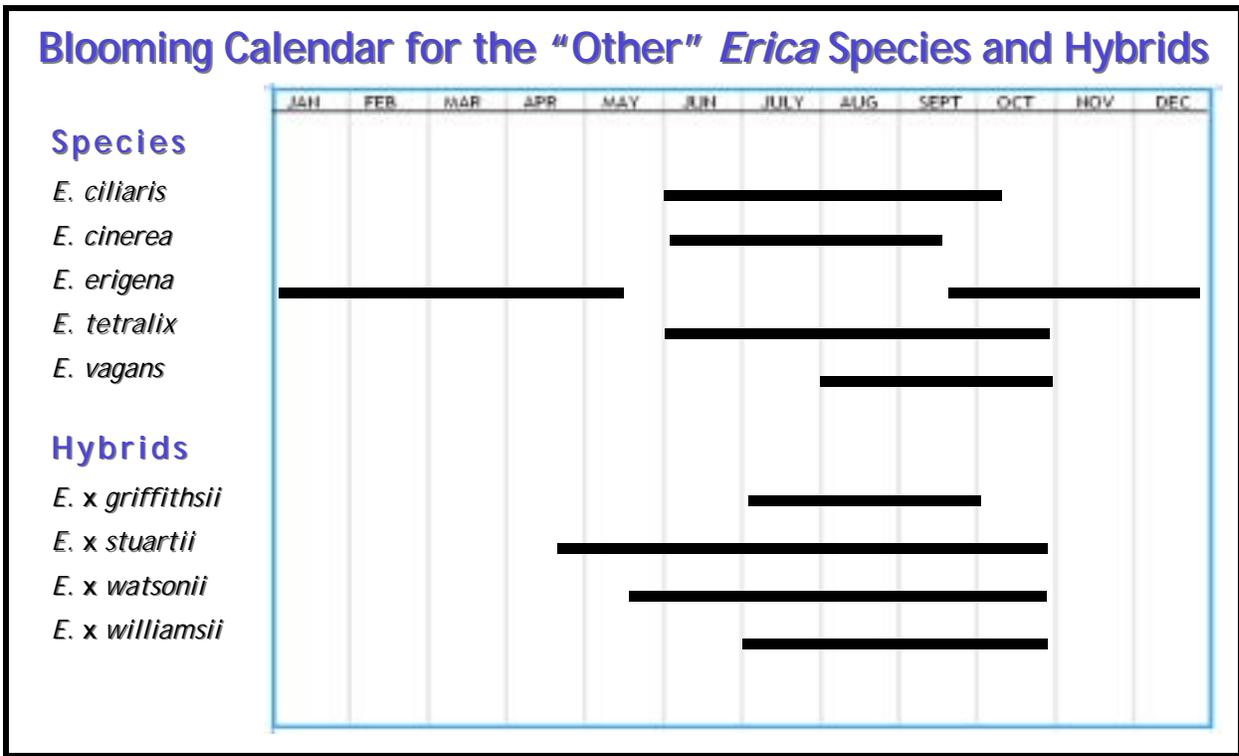
In order to share my experiences with our club members I organized my thoughts on this subject and presented a two-part discussion about five of the *Erica* species and four of the *Erica* hybrids which can be successfully grown in our local climate.

Many of these special heathers have been made available to us at the heather sales hosted by the Vancouver Island Heather

Society with plant material obtained from “The Heather Farm” in Sardis, British Columbia. These special heathers are not commonly found for sale elsewhere in our community.

The following information describes the growing requirements as well as the advantages and disadvantages of the various varieties. The blooming calendar shows when these plants are able to add colour to your garden. Also note that most of the cultivars in three of the four hybrid varieties provide us with the added colour of their “spring tips”.

I want to thank Joyce Prothero, the editor of *HeatherDrift*, who has assisted me in adjusting the format of this information to make it suitable for publication. Joyce also added the photos which were not part of my original presentation.



## Information Snippets on “Other” *Erica* Species and Hybrids



### *Erica ciliaris*

- Zone 7 with protection
- full sun
- moist acidic soil
- long racemes
- requires annual pruning
- leaves gray-green / dark green, white undersides
- flowers usually rose-pink
- short blooming period
- not commonly available
- Examples: ‘Corfe Castle’, ‘David McClintok’ (photo)



### *Erica cinerea*

- Zone 6 with protection
- open sunny exposure
- acidic moisture retaining soil
- pruning not required
- benefit by occasional shaping
- can be difficult to establish
- must keep moist for 1<sup>st</sup> year
- requires good drainage
- dark green leaves
- showy bell shaped flowers

**A sampling of *Erica cinerea* cultivars.** 1. ‘Purple Beauty’, 2. ‘Rock Pool’, 3. ‘Frances’, 4. ‘Lime Soda’, 5. ‘Rose Queen’, 6. ‘C. G. Best’, 7. ‘Colligan Bridge’, 8. ‘Domino’, 9. ‘Golden Drop’.



*Erica tetralix*, growing wild on the Scottish moors (intermixed by *Calluna vulgaris*)

### *Erica tetralix*

- Zone 4, *very hardy*
- acid moist soil.
- tolerates some dryness when established
- many have grey-green foliage
- long blooming period
- may appear messy - prune to shape
- shows mixture of fresh flowers and russet coloured spent flowers
- Examples: ‘Alba Mollis’, ‘Con Underwood’, ‘Swedish Yellow’



### *Erica vagans*

- Zone 5 if unpruned until spring
- acid or alkaline soil
- may require magnesium supplement
- can be pruned hard in spring
- tolerates some shade
- Examples: ‘Lyonnesse’, ‘Miss Waterer’ (photo), ‘Mrs D. F. Maxwell’, ‘Yellow John’



### *Erica erigena*

- Zone 7b
- tolerates most soils
- large - height up to 5'
- can be used as low hedge
- many have scented flowers
- stems can be brittle
- protect from heavy snow burden
- Examples: ‘Irish Dusk’, ‘Maxima’ (photo by Cleo Hall), ‘Superba’

## Some of the Hybrids

### *Erica x griffithsii*

(*E. vagans* x *E. manipuliflora*)

- Zone 6
- lime tolerant
- early flowers (like *E. vagans*)
- vigorous growth (like *E. manipuliflora*)
- Examples: ‘Heaven Scent’, ‘Valerie Griffiths’ (photo)



### *Erica x stuartii*

(*E. tetralix* x *E. mackayana*)

- Zone 7
- naturally-occurring sterile hybrid
- moist acid soil
- has brightly coloured spring growth
- Examples: ‘Irish Lemon’, ‘Irish Orange’ (photo), ‘Pat Turpin’

### *Erica x watsonii*

(*E. tetralix* x *E. ciliaris*)

- Zone 7
- acid soil
- sterile
- long flowering period
- brightly coloured spring tips
- Examples: ‘Dawn’, ‘Dorothy Methany’, ‘Mary’, ‘Pearly Pink’ (photo)



### *Erica x williamsii*

(*E. tetralix* x *E. vagans*)

- Zone 5
- sterile
- grows on alkaline soil
- bright yellow spring tips
- occurs naturally only on the Lizard Peninsula, Cornwall, England
- Examples: ‘Cow-y-Jack’, ‘P.D. Williams’, ‘Ken Wilson’ (photo)

## The Q-and-A Page

### THE QUESTION

I have one quick question. Is it worthwhile to prune summer heather which is beginning to show the new spring tips on some stems of the plant? (After just now reading a pruning guide on the web, I realize that I should have done it in the fall.)

I don't remember what variety these are. Was so disorganized when setting up our townhouse after our move to Victoria in 2006, that I never got more organized re the heather plantings until recently. If I prune off the old blooms now, losing the new little tips, will the stems regenerate in time to bloom in the summer?

### ANSWERS FROM VIHS MEMBERS

**#1** I'm facing the same problem in my garden with my *Calluna vulgaris*. What I'm doing is, if the plant looks scraggly, giving it a "good" pruning (but taking no more than 2 years' growth), knowing that it might end up blooming a week or so later than otherwise. In fact, some people use spring pruning to purposefully delay blooming. Or, conversely, they prune in the fall so that they'll have earlier bloom the following year. So the choice is yours. But, in your current situation, it would be better to do the pruning sooner rather than later.

**#2** Pruning summer heathers in spring...Ahhhhhh!! The big question! Generally I prune summer-blooming heathers after they have flowered, sometime in the early fall before the hard frost arrives. I would be somewhat worried about pruning them right now in case there is a hard frost.— my experienced gardening neighbour says there will be a significant frost before spring arrives to stay! So, my advice is to "hang tough," wait until all the danger of a major frost is past. This is the process that I use for some of my summer-blooming heathers which look really nice through the winter with their spent blooms showing silver against their grey-green foliage. I always prune the ones that have coloured foliage in early fall – but, sometimes I forget one or two so they are shorn in the early spring. It is a process that works for me, and they flower every summer. Good luck!

**#3** First of all, there are several types of what we call "heathers" that flower in the summer. Two of these types really do need pruning. The first is *Calluna vulgaris* which you may recognise as the Scottish heather. This *must* be pruned. You can either prune it now (I have just finished pruning

mine) or in the fall. If you prune in the early fall you will enhance the lovely tip colours that appear on some varieties. When you prune *Calluna vulgaris* make sure that you prune it back below the spent blooms but do not go into the old wood. If you do not prune *Calluna* over several years, this plant will get very leggy and out-of-control.

The second type of "heather" that flowers in the summer is *Daboecia* which you may know as the Irish heather. You may wish to cut off spent blooms in the fall but leave your serious pruning until the spring. *Daboecia* can tolerate severe pruning.

**#4** Some of the *Erica* species also flower in the spring. You may know this species as heath. It is not necessary to prune the *Erica*, but every now and again you may wish to prune them right after they flower in order to keep the plants bushy and well shaped.

**#5** I'd suggest, depending on the numbers of heathers you have, to experiment a bit and prune every other one now; that way you'll have some with tips and some without, but those without will perhaps flower better. Then, in the fall, prune all of the plants, shaping at the same time, to get a more consistent display next year.

**#6** Unless the heather has lovely winter colour, I would prune it now, because there is still time for lots of new blooms to regenerate. However, if there is good winter colour or bright spring tips, then I would sacrifice the abundance of blooms in the coming summer in order to have colour in the heather bed right now. You will still have a good display of colour in the summer/fall.

**Editor's Note.** As I was preparing this issue of *HeatherDrift*, an unsolicited question (above) arrived via e-mail on February 14th. Knowing that the pruning strategies of VIHS members differ somewhat, I independently invited several members with mature gardens to respond. As is evident above, there is considerable flexibility within the general pruning guidelines outlined by Elaine Scott (page 2). In summary, it seems that experience might be the best teacher.

**SATURDAY, MARCH 27, 2010**

## VIHS Spring Heather Sale

**NOTE  
LOCATION** →

Farmers' Institute Hall, 3550 Watson Ave. Cobble Hill

9:30 am Doors open at 9:30 am.  
9:45 am Introductory talk on heather.  
10:00 am Sale begins and continues until noon, or **SOLD OUT**.

Heathers for sale include:

- ★ winter-blooming heaths, including tree heaths
- ★ summer-blooming heaths and heathers
- ★ special collection heathers
- ★ heathers with coloured foliage
- ★ planter arrangements, and
- ★ starter kits complete with planting diagrams.

The expanded Heather Sale includes a display of heather photo, *and* Master Gardeners to answer general gardening questions. There will be formal demonstrations on pruning, planting, and floral arrangements incorporating heather.



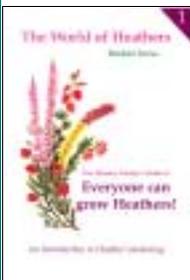
**STARTER KITS** provide the purchaser with a selection of ten heather plants plus a planting diagram designed to provide a heather bed with year-round interest. Themes for the Spring 2010 collections are: "**Tips**," "**Fabulous Foliage**," and "**Flower Power**." Starter kits cost \$30 for non-members (\$25 for members).

**NOTE:** Payment for a VIHS membership (\$10) entitles a new member to immediate discounts on purchases of plants and books.

## VIHS Library

As a service to members, VIHS maintains a lending library, available at monthly meetings. Sheila Yaremko, our librarian, brings a selection of books and journals to meetings, and also accepts requests from members wishing to borrow specific publications. For a general listing of holdings, contact Sheila (250 7436570. <arwe@shaw.ca>) or visit the VIHS website at [www.bcheathersociety.org](http://www.bcheathersociety.org).

## Heather Books and Notecards for Sale



**Everyone Can Grow Heathers**  
Daphne Everett, 2000

This 20-page publication, Booklet #1 in the *THS Booklet Series*, provides an intro to heather gardening. Topics range from choosing plants, to planting, and aftercare. Numerous colour photos.

\$10 (Chapter members, \$8)



**Recommended Heathers**  
David Small and Ron Cleveley, 1999

Booklet #2 in the THS booklet series lists 100 heathers recommended by THS members. It includes full descriptions for these heathers plus 28 colour photos. To help in plant selection, groupings by foliage and flower characteristics are included.

\$10 (Chapter members, \$8)



**Hardy Heather Cultivars Originating in North America**  
Joyce Prothero, 2008

A 24-page publication with descriptions and photos of 85 heather cultivars which originated in North America, as chance seedlings, mutations, or by hybridization.

\$5 (Chapter members, \$4)



### Heather Notecards

Les Harper has been a life-long artist. He worked as a free lance artist, for newspapers, ad agencies, as a book illustrator and fashion designer, and with the provincial Queen's Printer for 28 years. His notecard design has been generously donated for our fundraising efforts.

\$5 per packet of four notecards, with envelopes.

These books & cards are available for sale at VIHS Heather Sales, also from Willie McDermot-Bruce, 743-5312, <wmb@shaw.ca>.