

Virtual Hortlandia 2020

Highland Heather

www.highlandheather.com

Phone: Janice at 503-263-2428.

This week Joanne Fuller talked with Janice Leinwebber from Highland Heathers and edited the conversation for this article.

How did Highland Heathers get started?

I worked in the industry and actually got a degree in ornamental horticulture. I spent thirty years collecting and growing heathers. Then I added ornamental shrubs and grasses-- things that mix well with heathers. It seemed natural to start the nursery.

What do you like about heathers?

They are year-round plants-- something is always blooming or showing good color. They are pest free, easy to take care of and come in a huge variety of colors. Like all plant people, I love almost all plants but after 30 years of collecting, I still love the heathers.

What heathers do you recommend to customers?

I like the new Dutch varieties that are bud bloomers. The flowers of bud blooming heathers don't fully open so the color stays all the way until winter. *Calluna vulgaris* 'Renate' is a nice one, it blooms dark purple turning plum. It holds the flowering stems very upright making it a great garden plant.

Erica x darleyensis blooms all winter and makes a nice rounded bush. Good cultivars are 'White Perfection' with beautiful white flowers with grey-white foliage that holds its color very well and 'Kramer's Red' which has bright red flowers again for a very long time. *Erica carnea* is a lower growing mat forming plant that also holds its color for a long time. All of these plants have foliage in a wide range of colors depending upon the cultivar so every gardener can choose what works for their garden.

What about the taller heathers?

You are talking about *Erica x veitchii*-- I grow *Erica x veitchii* 'Pink Joy'. It blooms after the winter heathers-- in early spring to early summer --with pink buds opening to white flowers, extending the season of bloom. Mine is five feet tall adding some height to the bed. It's pretty vigorous, I prune it hard and they grow fast. With some pruning, it can form a nice dense shrub with good texture.

You said heathers are easy to grow, do you have some growing tips for gardeners?

The biggest issue is planting them in the right place. If you site them right, they will grow well. They need good drainage and full sun--at least half day sun. And they don't like crowding or plants flopping over them, they need their own defined space. They like a little pruning or shearing to keep the growth tight. Best to water them deeply and then let them completely dry out. They can get fungus in hot/wet conditions, so I recommend watering in late evening, at night or early in the morning so the foliage can dry out before it gets hot.

What's looking good at the nursery now?

Erica cinera, the bell heather is great to buy right now. They bloom in flushes through the summer and come in jewel tones-- particularly magentas and purples. Erica stuartii 'Irish Orange' and 'Irish Lemon' are blooming right now with foliage tips that are orange and yellow. They both have a soft texture that is different from many other heathers. Calluna vulgaris 'Zoe' and Calluna vulgaris 'Firefly' both are good to grow for foliage color. 'Zoe' has gold foliage now that will turn to red in winter. 'Firefly' which is a larger plant has foliage that transitions from yellow in Spring to orange in summer and then to chocolate in winter.

I think people should grow Erica tetralix more often. It's called the cross-leaved heath. It has white flowers and grey foliage and the leaves grow across each other creating a very different texture. It will also take wetter conditions where many other heaths and heathers can not grow.

We offer many small shrubs that work well when planted with heathers including Abelia x grandiflora 'Rose Creek, Arbutus Unedo 'Compacta', Callicarpa bodinieri 'Profusion', Euonymus alatus 'Compacta' and E. alatus 'Ruby Haag'. I also offer both Sarcococca hookeriana humilis and Vaccinium ovatum which are tough ground covering plants providing different textures in the garden. I am always trying to find new drought tolerant shrubs with year-round interest that we can add to our inventory.

How do customers shop for your plants now?

We do a lot of mail order. For people who are local, onsite shopping by appointment is an option. People just call me for an appointment -- Janice at 503-263-2428. The nursery is one acre. We have about one half acre of plants outside in pots for folks to walk through and six green houses for things that take a little bit of shade. People have seemed to enjoy wandering around and have been respectful of each other. Because shopping is by appointment there are never too many people here.