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Golden Taxus baccata ‘Standishii’ remains a valued asset within the Plumridge heather garden long after many “dwarf” conifers of similar age outgrew their welcome. January photo by David Plumridge.
Erica erigena ‘Ivory’

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Plant descriptions are often most inadequate, and it is a tough (and at times pointless) battle to trace an adequate description of a cultivar. “The white flowers, Feb.–May, have a white corolla and pale pink sepals. Mid grey-green foliage. Compact habit. Ht. 35cm. Spd. 50cm.” In terms of identifying the cultivar, that is pretty but also pretty useless: there is nothing therein that is unique, even the combination of features. Yet, mention of pink sepals in combination with a white corolla could be indicative, especially when none of the other descriptions of cultivars of Erica erigena in the same source—Handy guide to heathers, the first edition (1992)—includes any mention of sepals of any colour. Note that nothing is said about the anthers or the internal structure of the flower.

That 1992 description of ‘Ivory’ is the earliest to give any details. When the name was published in the 1978 Yearbook of The Heather Society (p. 44), the descriptive content of the text amounts to this: “somewhat scruffy looking ... with off-white flowers’, adding “a pleasant addition to the erigena range being covered with bloom very different from the usual white forms ...” (p. 45).

The Chatelains of Orpington, Kent, first mentioned and described this cultivar. They said that it had been introduced by Mr. R. E. Hardwick, The Nursery (or Hardwicks Nursery), Newick, Lewes, Sussex, but that “it is no longer in cultivation.” I am not quite sure what they meant by the quoted statement, because they added “We hope to rectify this omission ... [sic]”—presumably they had propagated it and so it was not actually extinct. In 1992, ‘Ivory’ was marketed by three nurseries in England: Barncroft Nurseries, Otter’s Court Heathers, and Berrydown Nurseries. Nowadays, no one in the United Kingdom sells it, at least according to the Royal Horticultural Society’s Plantfinder. But, it is not extinct (I am tempted to add “again”)—or is it?

There is a clone of Erica erigena in English gardens, and perhaps in North American ones, too, under this name. When I first encountered ‘Ivory’, the adjective “Irish” had been tagged to the name, but it never was Irish. Hardwick selected the cultivar, but where he obtained it is unknown.

Returning to my original point about descriptions, if the present clone is the true plant— and regrettably there is no way of telling—the white corolla and pink sepals of the Handy guide description (and thence at one time also The Heather Society’s website) are quite wrong.

The corolla is like a squat urn, about 4mm long and 3mm across at its widest, translucent and colourless (and so seeming white) at the base and shading to light pink at the lobes, the tint enhanced by the dark anthers inside. The sepals (calyx lobes) are also white (colourless), with pale yellow-green tips: they certainly are not pink. That the anthers are dark red, almost black, is unusual for a “white” heather—true whites, like Erica erigena ‘W. T. Rackliff’, have golden or tan anthers because they do not produce anthocyanin (which gives the pinkness). Another unusual characteristic is that the filaments of the stamens are crumpled, not straight as expected. They do not produce pollen. Even more remarkable is the contorted style—the degree of contortion varies from individual flower to individual flower, but as shown in the accompanying photograph, it can be almost spirally bent towards the base.
It is a pity none of this was incorporated into previous descriptions! Of course, I have to wonder whether what I grow under the name 'Ivory' was what Hardwick introduced or the Chatelains propagated. It is an impossible question to answer; but the moral is that new cultivars should be examined in minute detail, flowers should be dissected and the inner structure looked at with a hand lens, at least, and the resulting descriptions should be as comprehensive as possible. “Leaves grey green, flowers white, Feb.–May”, perhaps with the likely dimensions when pruned appended, is not a helpful description, even when pink sepals are mentioned!

If anyone in NAHS does grow 'Ivory' and the sepals are pink, please contact me immediately!


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Ersocket titles


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The comments below are from an exchange of emails about characteristics of the putative Erica erigena ‘Ivory’ discussed by E. Charles Nelson in the previous article. Karla’s plant came from Alice Knight, who got it from Dee Daneri, who thinks it came from David and Anne Small’s Denbeigh Heathers nursery in Ipswich, England. According to Richard Canovan, it was listed in Denbeigh’s 1986 catalogue: “Ivory fl. Jan–May – mid grey/green fol.”

Harstine refers to Harstine Island, in the west side of Puget Sound. Karla’s house is a short distance from the water. There are well-established large trees and shrubs to shelter her garden there.

Karla’s nursery display garden is on the mainland near Shelton, WA, not all that far from Harstine Island but totally exposed.

Erica erigena ‘Ivory’ in full bloom in Charles Nelson’s garden.
Photo by E. Charles Nelson.

Karla: I have ‘Ivory’ on Harstine. It is the last cultivar of E. erigena to bloom and can be in bloom on the 4th of July some years. Though it does start in May, it blooms through June most years and is finishing up by early July. It is a long bloomer if the weather is not too hot. Just really depends!

‘Ivory’ is very tender. I cannot grow it at the display garden, only on Harstine, United States Department of Agriculture Hardiness Zone 8, by the water on the Cove. It dies every single time I put it out [in the display garden] at Spencer Lake in Zone 7. My display garden is the first to freeze and the last to thaw!

The only erigena cultivars that really get damaged every single winter at Spencer Lake are: ‘Ivory’, ‘W. T. Rackliff’, ‘Nana’, and ‘Thing Nee’. ‘W. T. Rackliff’ has pretty much died out at Spencer Lake but is not injured on Harstine Island. The others all do great. Only a few stem splits here and there.

Charles: USDA zones are an entirely American concept that have no real value or equivalent in Europe. They are like the Ten Commandments—set in stone, immutable, for American gardeners only, and we simply cannot comprehend them. They are only applicable to the North American continent and are so very vague as to be useless for comparative purposes.
'Ivory' as I know it is VERY HARDY. It has survived at least -10° C [14° F] in Outwell [Cambridgeshire], but what “surviving” -10° C represents in eastern England is perhaps rather different (I suspect) from what USDA thinks surviving -10° C represents. For us, such temps last a few hours at most—below-freezing temperatures are relatively short-lived. Prolonged periods of sub-zero Celsius [32° F] temps are very unusual and can be quite lethal, of course.

The photo from Karla certainly seems to show what I grow, and that compares well also with Richard’s [Wiltshire] plant. So I cannot explain the difference in habit. I also cannot explain why it is so much later coming into flower. This year, my plant did not really last into June, having started in mid-April. But it was still the last of the erigena that I have.

Possibly a difference in latitude 47° N [Shelton] versus 52° N [Outwell] with the concomitant differences in day length is a factor, but that is a mere grasping at straws.

What is clear is that it behaves differently in WA than in the UK—here it is as hardy as nails, surviving frosts and extended periods of below-freezing temperatures. I have had the plant for about a dozen years.

But then all erigenas are hardy. I have never heard of them being killed outright by cold, and they grow down to the ocean edge, so while [they are] burnt by salt spray, that also does not seem lethal. They also occur very close to the ocean on the coast of northern Spain.

Richard: I agree with what Charles says, but I still think there is clear evidence that part of the problem in the Pacific Northwest is the very low relative humidity you get in some of your very cold spells. Those of February 2006, December 2008, December 2009, early December 2013 and January 2015 were examples that in this country we would consider extreme. Sanderson Field Airport has good records of minimum and maximum temperature and relative humidity—you can see this from the WeatherOnline archive for Washington (select Shelton from the list). You will see RH below 60, even 40, with temperatures between –5° C [20° F] and –12° C
[10° F]. This is no doubt due to dry katabatic winds or very cold air descending over the mountains and being warmed and dried. I accept that Karla’s display garden is probably Zone 7.

In a mild season, such a cold spell can devastate some erigenas, which is why the ‘Ivory’ plant I have is on the west side of a fence. But it has withstood January and December 2010 (when temperatures may have been nearer -15° C [5° F]), February 2012 and March 2013, and so have all the others. We have freezing winds—notably down here in the Thames Valley in February 1986, February 1991 and January 1997, when erigenas in pots were lost but not those in the ground.

My ‘Ivory’ finished at the very end of May, with only ‘Irish Silver’ blooming later, until the second week of June. It looks like Karla’s to me.

Charles: Richard, thanks for your additional insights. I think all we can safely say is that we find it hardy in English conditions.

Karla: Sometimes it is wind damage, for sure. Many plants can be burned on the NE side. However, usually when it is really cold here, it is very, very calm. Usually the coldest nights have not a breath of wind. I cannot grow ‘Ivory’ outside at Spencer Lake even under frost blanket protection most years. It is very tender there. The cold settles below where the major section of 4-inch pots is. It was 5° F [-15° C] there in 2009. It died this past mild winter under the frost blankets where ‘Irish Dusk’ and ‘W. T. Rackliff’ were fine. ‘Nana’ burns easily as well every year in the garden and under the frost blankets but usually lives.

Zone 8 would be 10° F [-10° C] minimum, which is more in line with Harstine Island. On Harstine, the lowest has been 13° F [-10.5° C]. ‘Ivory’ is in a garden bed along the stone patio only six feet from the house. The slope of the garden is facing primarily west.

For more about what constitutes “hardiness” in heathers, see Karla’s article on hardiness, this issue, which was prompted by
Hardiness questions in heaths and heathers

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When I look at the hardiness ratings of *Calluna vulgaris* and the various ericas, I wonder at how the United States Department of Agriculture hardiness zones do not seem to apply to my plants in my garden. My display garden has about 2,000 plants in it. It is supposedly in USDA Zone 7. The lowest temperature I have ever measured in this garden is 5° F. The hottest is 103° F. The garden is located three miles from Puget Sound and a few hundred yards from a large lake named Spencer Lake.

The garden is now 12 years old. The soil is a sandy and rocky loam. It is rife with boulders and gravel along with sand. I do not see much in the way of loam there. Every hole has to be dug with a pickaxe, and boulders need to be removed from the holes. Drainage is excellent unless there is a lot of rain that moves through the garden on the way out to a lower location. At those times, it can create little brooks through certain areas. Seven to ten inches of rain in a week is not unheard of here on the edge of the rainforest.

**Cold Damage**

I can have cold damage to this garden when other gardens that are closer to Puget Sound will be unaffected, as they are in a true Zone 8. The heathers that suffer the most cold damage are cultivars of *Erica cinerea* and *Calluna*. Wait, aren’t they supposed to be hardy to Zones 5 and 4 respectively? Not in my garden! I find damage on the NW and NE sides of the callunas. The cold scorches them as if someone hit them with a blow torch. The miniatures usually show the most damage. On the other hand, some cultivars never seem to be damaged, but that might be because of their location. The forest edge offers a lot of protection. It’s a rare winter here when there is any snow on the ground for protection. The kind we get is so wet and heavy that it ruins the plants by splaying them out. The snow always ends by getting rained on. This can be a disaster for the plants. The weight of the resulting wet mess makes them look as if someone had stomped on them.

*Erica cinerea* cultivars often suffer from severe stem splitting. Why? The weather flip-flops throughout winter from Pineapple to Arctic Expresses. The plants go in and out of dormancy and suffer the consequences. A now-common scenario is that they have not had a frost in either November or December before temperatures suddenly plunge low enough to damage them. Alternatively, they may harden off normally, but in January, a warm rain of 60° F. arrives from the tropics. The plants pop out of dormancy and start growing. Then in comes February with a sudden blast of cold from the north or, worse, east. Then there is all sorts of damage. With luck, it is not life threatening.

*Erica × darleyensis*, *E. erigena*, *E. mackayana*, *E. vagans* and *E. × watsonii*, can be damaged, too. Surprisingly, with the exception of ‘W.T. Rackliff’ and ‘Thing Nee’, the Zone 7-rated *E. erigena* cultivars appear to fare better than many cultivars of *Calluna vulgaris*. Go figure! Interestingly, tiny *Erica × williamsii* ‘Gold Button’ has
suffered very little damage. *E. × williamsii* ‘Gwavas’ and ‘P.D. Williams’ seem to always be fine, as well. These are rated to Zone 6, which is two zones less hardy than *Calluna*.

I have come to the conclusion that cold hardiness is relative to the cold front that is moving through at that particular moment in time.

**Summer Damage**

Some heath and heather damage comes from summer drought. The summer of 2015 was a test of the limits of many heather cultivars. It was brutally dry all year coming into summer, as well. The pipes coming out of our well became clogged with iron bacteria, so the nursery was getting watered but there was no extra capacity to water the garden. By the time the well pump and pipe were replaced, the garden had suffered a lot of casualties. In one far corner, the only living plant was *E. vagans* ‘Yellow John’. The species has a reputation for being drought tolerant and proved that it is, indeed.

In the dry, sandy soil of my display garden, *E. carnea* plants do not grow well, with the exception of ‘Golden Starlet’. The carneas seem to need a fair amount of water. Those closest to the leaky sprinkler heads do the best. Those that are nearer to the forest in a bit richer soil with more organic matter fare better, as well. ‘Golden Starlet’ is a true star in the garden and the top seller when folks see it. Unlike other carneas, this cultivar seems to hold up well to drought and does not sunburn unless it gets abnormally hot in April when the plants are actively growing. I have seen some scorch then if temperatures reach 90° F. But it does recover.

I had to yank out a deceased 12-year-old huge *Calluna* ‘Caerketton White’ with the backhoe. The lack of water killed it last summer. It was on the edge of a zone where two sprinklers barely hit and overlap in normal years. With the well limping along, there was not enough water pressure, and it got too dry. This was a tragic loss!

Plants suffered where conditions were driest, near the edges of the garden. The middle of the garden is safer. Perhaps that is why the *E. erigena* do so well. Many are very tall, so they get to be in the center of things.

*Erica cinerea* plants are not happy about drought conditions. This is the most fickle species in my garden. They all were fine until 2009, but they have suffered winter and/or summer damage ever since. They do not like cold nor excess dryness. They are so beautiful, though, that I keep on trying. They are good for a while, and then something severe blows in the wind and they are gone.
I have come to believe that *E. cinerea* plants prefer partial shade here. It is interesting to note that on Harstine Island, Zone 8, where I live, I have had them growing without any care since 2002. The lowest temperature I have seen on Harstine was 13° F, in 2009. In my home garden, they get afternoon sun in summer and virtually no winter sun. Thus my theory that they like some shade. I never water them, though some water may move downhill to them when we water the nursery above them. They are never damaged on this protected hillside in the forest.

I proclaim *Erica x darleyensis* to be the toughest species in the garden for drought and bad soil. They can grow where others will not. I often put them in the places where all others have failed before them. The next best is *Erica vagans*. Both of the above can get some winter damage, though. *Erica vagans* is good at recovering. I have seen them sprout from a bare stem.

Remember to always leave the large, weather-damaged plants alone for a bit, as they just might recover in places. For example, *Daboecia* are semi-deciduous. They can lose leaves and come right back. Always give them the chance to do so.

I would cover my garden during severe cold spells, but covering the nursery stock takes precedence. I do put downed fir boughs on the more tender plants, such as *Daboecia azorica*, and hope for the best. It is still alive. I spray the nursery stock with the equivalent of Wilt Pruf™ for some protection.

No matter what happened in our gardens in the past, we never know what challenge is coming in the future. If last year was a difficult one, you might try praying that the weather gods are kinder to you next season.
DESIRABLE SMALL CONIFERS NOT RECOMMENDED FOR THE HEATHER GARDEN

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Photos by author unless otherwise credited.

However beautiful a plant may be in and of itself (or shall we say “in glorious isolation”), if it is in the wrong place or has the wrong neighbors, it is not an asset to the garden. Some gardeners are happy playing musical plants and will move a plant numerous times until they discover its perfect spot. I belong to the group that prefers to locate that perfect spot before planting anything and have the plant remain there in perpetuity. (I also have never been able to understand women—it is usually women—who rearrange the furniture every six months.) For various reasons, when choosing small conifers for my heather garden, I failed miserably with regard to the “in perpetuity” part.

When Larry Stanley of Stanley and Sons Nursery, specialists in dwarf and miniature conifers, spoke about conifers for the heather garden at the 2006 NAHS conference, he asserted that miniature conifers should not be planted with heathers because the heathers would overwhelm them. (Miniature conifers put on an inch or less of new growth a year, whereas dwarf conifers grow from one to six inches annually.) I had been quite taken with Picea glauca ‘Echiniformis’—a miniature spruce—and had planted it in my heather garden next to two creeping heathers, Calluna vulgaris ‘Soay’ and Erica cinerea ‘Celebration’. At the time of Larry’s talk, these plants had been cohabiting nicely for several years, so I was skeptical of his advice. I’d heard horror stories of dwarf conifers
overwhelming heathers, not the other way around.

Turns out that Larry knew what he was talking about. After a few more years, I had to start actively pruning ‘Celebration’ to keep it from overgrowing ‘Soay’, and I had to work hard to keep both ‘Celebration’ and the comparatively restrained ‘Soay’ from crowding out ‘Echiniformis’. ‘Echiniformis’ is a darling little spruce that forms a tight ball of needles resembling a sea urchin, hence the cultivar name. It needs its own niche in a rock garden, where it can be protected from being ambushed by more vigorous neighbors. Not quite so tiny as ‘Echiniformis’, but still in the “very slow growing” category, is the dwarf bird’s nest spruce Picea abies ‘Little Gem’.

In 2005, four years after planting, the five plants of Erica cinerea ‘Celebration’ (foreground) have grown together but are not yet threatening the plants of slower growing Calluna vulgaris ‘Soay’ (above and to their left) or the little bluish-green ball of Picea glauca ‘Echiniformis’ (center). Lower right is Calluna ‘Fort Bragg’, with Calluna ‘Roter Oktober’ upper right. Photo by Barry Wulff.

Picea abies ‘Little Gem’. Like ‘Echiniformis’, this has very tight growth and, although not contrasting in shape with heather, it gives good textural contrast.

I planted ‘Little Gem’ above some large rocks and planted a group of five Calluna ‘Carmen’ above and to one side of the spruce, allowing plenty of space between heathers and spruce—I thought. The heathers, though pruned annually, took only a few years to start pushing up against the spruce. ‘Carmen’ is definitely one of the more vigorous Calluna cultivars, and with gravity giving the long-stemmed heather an assist, ‘Little Gem’ was no match for it.

2016 NAHS Conference Heather in the Redwoods

Our H.E.R.E. chapter has planned a great conference in Eureka, CA for this August 10–13, with lectures, workshops, a plant sale (of course!) and visits to beautiful gardens in this beautiful area. Email Chris House chrisalis@suddenlink.net for details.
Rather than let the valuable little conifer be destroyed, I dug it up and gave it away. Today there is no sign that anything other than ‘Carmen’ had been planted in that part of the garden.

There are many miniature conifers that would look good with heathers, but the only way to prevent the heathers from swallowing these babies is to graft them onto standards. And not just any standard will do. It must be high enough to lift the desirable conifer cultivar well above the potential top of heather neighbors.

At about the time I planted ‘Echiniformis’, I fell in love with *Picea pungens* ‘Blue Pearl’, which at our first meeting was a little ball of blue foliage grown on a short standard. I thought I had the perfect spot for this, where its color would contrast nicely with the foliage color of the low-growing heathers C. ‘Cairnwell’, C. ‘Gold Kup’, and *Daboecia × scotica* ‘Silversmith’. So it was, for a while. Eventually, though the heathers were pruned severely every year, they gradually increased in both width and height, until now they threaten to overgrow ‘Blue Pearl’ from all sides. If the spruce had been grafted onto a standard two feet high instead of only about eight or nine inches, the heathers could meet each other under the spruce instead of shoving up against it and eventually overtopping it.

In 2005, *Picea* ‘Little Gem’ (lower left) and *Calluna* ‘Carmen’ were amicably sharing garden space. *Erica arborea* ‘Estrella Gold’ is center top. Photo by Barry Wulff.

By 2009, ‘Carmen’ had grown so large that it was starting to envelop the tiny spruce. *Erica × stuartii* ‘Irish Lemon’ is below the rocks.

One would never know that there had been any plant but *Calluna* ‘Carmen’ (top) in this spot. *Calluna* ‘Dunnet Lime’ grows below the rocks. *Erica × stuartii* ‘Irish Lemon’ is center right.

Visit The Heather Society’s new website for answers to all your heather questions. From how to grow heathers to how to design a heather garden to a comprehensive (and constantly expanding) list of heather cultivars—some with photographs—this is your go-to site for information about heathers. Do remember that some hardiness and cultural advice on this site will need to be modified for North American gardens.
An example of heathers and a standard-mounted small conifer combining attractively may be found in Coenosium Gardens, Eatonville, Washington. Here, the heathers are upright cultivars, but the standard is tall enough to hold *Abies koreana* ‘Kohout’s Icebreaker’ well above them. This combination would not work with the dwarf fir planted in the ground or on a shorter standard, where it would eventually crowd out the heathers.

Discussion on the website of the American Conifer Society raised some cautions about the ultimate size of this gorgeous conifer that originated in Germany as a witch’s broom on *Abies koreana* ‘Horstmann’s Silberlocke’. Apparently older plants of ‘Kohout’s Icebreaker’ can develop one or more leaders and eventually become conical instead of staying squat or ball-shaped like the one in the photo. (The leaders may be pruned off.) Unfortunately, grafting the cultivar onto a standard can accelerate this change! On the other hand, growing ‘Kohout’s Icebreaker’ in the low-fertility soil where heathers thrive can avoid another potential problem with the cultivar, the “uncurling” of the distinctive needles whose extreme curling allows the lovely silvery underside of each needle to show. Planting the cultivar in rich soil encourages it to grow with uncurled needles.

It is well worth the trouble to seek out miniature conifers grafted onto tall standards. They are not easy to find and are rather expensive because of the extra labor involved in producing them and the time it takes to bring a mini to marketable size. The extra cost will be repaid many times over in the length of time these plants can remain as assets in the heather garden.

The classic heather/conifer combination is much more likely to be spoiled by the conifer outgrowing its place in the garden, not by the conifer being muggd by heathers. Dwarf conifers seem to have been designed to
complement heathers and in their youth are excellent heather companions. But they are, after all, dwarf trees (for the most part), and the term dwarf is relative. What dwarf usually means is that the cultivar is much slower growing than others of its kind, but it will continue to grow and eventually outgrow its allotted space in width and possibly also in height. Excess growth in width is much more of a problem, and much sooner, than growth in height. One of the reasons for planting little trees with heathers is precisely because they can provide needed height to contrast with the generally low, mounded shapes of heathers.

I scattered dwarf conifers of differing kinds and shapes here and there in my heather garden, but I was not nearly diligent enough in researching their growth habits, particularly the number of inches each might be expected to grow in height and width each year under average conditions. A dwarf that grows six inches a year will outgrow its space far sooner than one that adds little more than an inch a year. Shape matters. If much of the size increase is vertical, the dwarf tree will rarely become a problem. Not so a conical or squat cultivar.

Whatever possessed me to plant *Pinus mugo* ‘Valley Cushion’? The cultivar name says quite clearly that this is a squat version of the small pine so not suitable as a vertical accent. However, I’ve always admired *Pinus mugo*, and somebody told me that ‘Valley Cushion’ was the smallest mugo pine cultivar.

From the start, it was obvious that ‘Valley Cushion’ would become much larger than I had anticipated. During its youth, I religiously cut off most of each new candle (new growth on the tip of a pine stem) every spring to keep it in check. All this did was to encourage branching at the cut. Soon there were more candles than I could keep up with.

When the Wulff heather garden was only a few years old, *Pinus mugo* ‘Valley Cushion’ (top, left of center) was nicely balanced by groupings of heather plants such as *Calluna* ‘Dark Beauty’ (right foreground) and *Erica carnea* ‘Bell’s Extra Special’ (lower left with *E. cinerea* ‘Iberian Beauty’ above it). A line of *E. carnea* ‘Golden Starlet’ was planted to cascade down the slope to the right of ‘Valley Cushion’ and ‘Dark Beauty’. Photo by Barry Wulff.

By 2011, ‘Valley Cushion’ (center left) had grown to occupy a substantial chunk of garden real estate, unlike tall but narrow *Juniperus communis* ‘Compressa’ (upper right). In foreground left to right are an unidentified *E. cinerea*, *Daboecia cantabrica* ‘Rainbow’, and *Calluna* ‘Moon Glow’. *Calluna* ‘Velvet Fascination’ is between the pine and juniper.

By 2015, ‘Valley Cushion’ (top) had grown as wide as *Erica* ‘Bell’s Extra Special’ (left), *Calluna* ‘Dark Beauty’ (center with conspicuous reversion to ‘Dark Star’) and *E. ‘Golden Starlet’ (creeping into the ‘Dark Beauty’) combined.

So I left it alone, figuring that when the plant was tall enough, I’d simply cut off the lower branches and cloud prune it in the Japanese style, exposing the trunk and letting lots of light in below the canopy so that heather could grow underneath the tree. However, my early pruning efforts had made this approach extremely difficult. The tree was so dense that finding a way to begin this process was more than I could manage — or even expect a paid helper to do, and by this time the pine was too big to dig up. In the end, my helper dismembered the poor
thing branch by branch. When the trunk was finally exposed, he cut it off at ground level and mulched over it. There is a big empty space where ‘Valley Cushion’ used to grow, but eventually neighboring *Erica carnea* ‘Golden Starlet’ and *E. cinerea* ‘Iberian Beauty’ will cover most or, more likely, all of it. They are already in position to do so. It’s only a matter of time.

When I was shopping for dwarf conifers at our local garden center, their buyer suggested that I might like *Pinus parviflora* ‘Aoba Jo’. The little plant he showed me was much taller than wide, and its twisted needles were very attractive. I had just the spot for such a beauty, on the roadside slope of a berm, near but not on the top.

This pine, too, I pruned by shortening the candles every spring. Its growth was mainly vertical, and when I pruned it, I was careful to leave one candle at the top of the tree a little longer than the others to maintain apical dominance. Nevertheless, it did increase a little in width every year. After all, I couldn’t cut off the new side growth completely or I’d be removing the foliage that made ‘Aoba Jo’ so beautiful.

Then I visited the conifer garden within the Oregon Garden and saw a mature plant of ‘Aoba Jo’. No, it wasn’t the size of the ponderosa pines in our mountains, but in comparison to the space I’d designated for this cultivar in my garden, it was huge. Uh, oh.

I continued to prune ‘Aoba Jo’ for several years after that dismaying vision of its potential stature, but last year I finally had to admit defeat. I could barely walk past the tree—by then nearly as tall as I am—on the working path along the top of the berm, and no amount of pruning would stop its inevitably becoming larger out of all proportion to the rest of the garden. Reluctantly, I gave my helper the order to cut it off at ground level, as he had ‘Valley Cushion’. The tree had a 14-year root run; any attempt to dig it up would have been futile. I miss ‘Aoba Jo’, as I miss ‘Valley Cushion’, but it simply had to go.

As I look back on it now, my third venture into choosing a dwarf pine for the heather garden was probably just as misguided as the others, making special note of the cultivar name. *Pinus cembra* ‘Blue Mound’ (now, why didn’t “Mound” tip me off?) sounded charming in the catalogue description, and the little tree that arrived, a tiny thing with long blue needles, was charming, indeed. As it was purported to grow only two inches a year, eventually reaching three feet tall by two feet wide (not really a mound), I planted it at the other end of the berm from ‘Aoba Jo’ and hoped that as it grew, its placement would deter the deer from leaving their nearby path across the berm to wander the length of the berm on my working path. Because ‘Blue Mound’ was so small when it arrived, I kept a cage around it for several years to keep it from being trampled. Deer don’t usually eat sharp-needled conifers (they relish those with soft growth, such as *Chamaecyparis obtusa*), but they are not too careful about walking around small plants.

Once I decided that ‘Blue Mound’ had grown enough for the deer to notice and not squash, I removed its cage. Big mistake. They noticed it, all right. Though after several more years it was still far less than two feet high, it apparently made a good antler scratcher. Ouch! Back went the cage, and when spring arrived, I did what I could to repair the deer damage with careful pruning. I kept the cage in place for several more years, but the second time I removed it—surely the tree was tough enough by now that deer would choose other, more tender, trees as

Despite rigorous annual pruning, by 2015, *Pinus parviflora* ‘Aoba Jo’ (top) had grown so wide that I could barely walk past it on the working path, visible foreground left. *Picea glauca* ‘Jean’s Dilly’ (slightly behind and to the right of the pine) is the same age as ‘Aoba Jo’ and will probably never outgrow its place in the garden. *Calluna* ‘Spook’ flowers just in front of ‘Aoba Jo’
scratchers—the bucks found it just as attractive as before. This time, the damage was irreparable, and I gave it up. ‘Blue Mound’ was a lost cause.

In hindsight, the deer did me a favor. Had I looked at more than one nursery’s description of ‘Blue Mound’, I might have learned that in 30 years, this cultivar can mature into a sizeable ten feet tall by six feet wide. It is definitely not a candidate for the heather garden.

One other dwarf conifer is still on probation in my garden. The irregular growth of *Cryptomeria japonica* ‘Tansu’ makes it a picturesque part of any garden scene, more so as it gets larger. Unlike many other cryptomerias, ‘Tansu’ does not turn an unattractive brownish purple in winter but remains rich green all year. (This had been a strong selling point for me.) Its tiny needles are extremely prickly, so the deer have never even considered bothering it. Balanced against these attributes is a familiar drawback in the increasing size department. Irregular though its growth may be, it is definitely wider than tall.

‘Tansu’ and its heather neighbors have had a shoving match for the last few years. The conifer’s growth was inexorably outward as well as upward, but if it ventured to extend a basal branch too far in one direction, a tall heather might flop over the branch. On another side, a creeping heather actually ventured to climb into the tree. Should I save picturesque ‘Tansu’? Should I rescue the heathers, raison d’être for the garden’s existence?

A compromise might work: the aforementioned cloud pruning. Because I had never pruned ‘Tansu’, it had not acquired the impenetrable growth that had stopped us from cloud pruning *Pinus* ‘Valley Cushion’. Removing those long lower branches wouldn’t be easy because of the prickles, but it could be done. My helper set about cutting off all branches up to a foot above the ground. In so doing, he exposed not one but two sturdy trunks, and they are leaning! Some judicious cutting back of upper branches, and ‘Tansu’ was spared, at least for awhile. It is not properly cloud pruned (there are no separate “clouds” with bare limbs supporting them), but there is now ground exposed under the newly shaped tree. Its future may involve removal of the smaller trunk and occasional shortening of the top growth, and probably gradual removal of lower branches as the tree adds height. For now, ‘Tansu’ still has a home in my heather garden.
So, how did I become fixated upon the combination of conifers with heathers? I didn’t create my heather garden until after the heather/conifer gardening craze had run its course in England, but an exquisite English garden was my inspiration.

Rita and David Plumridge made extensive use of conifers in the heather garden they created at their home in a little village in Durham. They welcomed me to their garden at a time when the garden enjoyed perfect balance between conifers and heathers. Since my first visit to Rose Cottage, they have had to remove many of the original conifers, which threatened to take over the garden. See David’s note following this article for a list of conifers removed from the Plumridges’ heather garden, which is considerably larger than my heather garden. If, like me, you’d prefer to plant something you don’t have to dig up or cut down because it has outgrown its welcome, then unless your garden is truly huge, you will probably want to avoid the conifer cultivars on David’s list.

In the fall 2015 issue of HNQ, Stefani McRae-Dickey wrote about small conifers that could potentially be good heather companions. A few are still too new for their ultimate sizes to be known, but many may be seen in public gardens where they have grown for decades (or have been planted recently as large specimens). If I’d seen the mature specimen of Pinus ‘Aoba Jo’ at the Oregon Garden before I visited my garden center, I wouldn’t have bought ‘Aoba Jo’. If I’d done a few arithmetic calculations based upon the known growth rates of miniature conifers and the heathers I hoped to grow with them, I’d have realized that, as Larry Stanley said, miniature conifers have no place in the heather garden (except, perhaps, when grown on tall standards).

The conifers I’ve had to remove from my garden, or spend many hours shaping if they are to remain, are all good cultivars. They simply are not suitable for more than a few years in a heather garden.

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Editor(s) Wanted for Heather News Quarterly

If you are interested in heathers, enjoy corresponding with other heather growers, like playing with words and photographs, and have some familiarity with desktop publishing or are willing to learn it, then you could be the next editor of Heather News Quarterly.

This extremely important position in NAHS could be shared by two heather enthusiasts with different skills (for example: a writer/photographer and a desktop publisher). Please contact Ella May Wulff ewulff@peak.org for more information about this rewarding work.
“Dwarf” conifers that outgrew the Plumridges’ heather garden

David Plumridge
Rose Cottage, Castleside, Consett, County Durham, England  DH8 9AP  G3KMG@consett1.freeserve.co.uk

Regarding “dwarf/slow growing” conifers that weren’t dwarf/slow growing enough, the following come to mind. I can remember purchasing many of them about 34 years ago at Bressingham Gardens. We had, sadly, to remove them one by one as they outgrew the heather garden.

*Chamaecyparis lawsoniana* ‘Ellwood’s Gold’
*Chamaecyparis obtusa* ‘Nana Gracilis’
*Chamaecyparis pisifera* ‘Boulevard’
*Juniperus chinensis* ‘Pyramidalis’
*Juniperus communis* ‘Compressa’
*Picea glauca var. albertiana* ‘Conica’
*Picea pungens* ‘Koster’
*Taxus baccata* ‘Dovastoniana Aurea Pendula’

![Image of garden](image.jpg)

*Taxus baccata* ‘Dovastoniana Aurea Pendula’ (upper left), although a gorgeous tree, grew far too large for the Plumridges’ heather garden, seen here in a scan of an old photo by David Plumridge.
# TREASURER’S REPORT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>North American Heather Society</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>STATEMENT OF ACTIVITIES</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>January through December, 2015</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**INCOME**
- Membership Dues: $1,291.00
- Heather News-Print Ed.: 99.00
- Interest Earned: 1.05
- Contributions: 10.00

**TOTAL INCOME** $1,401.05

**EXPENSES**
- Credit Card Processing Fee: $10.85
- Internet Web Site: 53.98
- Fees- Corporate: 10.00

**TOTAL EXPENSE** $74.83

**POSITIVE NET ASSET BALANCE** $1,326.22

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>North American Heather Society</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>as of December 31st, 2015</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**ASSETS**
- Current Assets- Checking: $13,172.50
- Current Assets- Savings: $6,566.75

**TOTAL Current Assets** $19,739.25

**TOTAL ASSETS** $19,739.25

**LIABILITIES & NET ASSETS**
- Liabilities: $0.00

**TOTAL LIABILITIES** $0.00

**NET ASSETS**
- Unrestricted: $16,635.98
- Temp. Restricted Funds
  - Heather Research: $3,003.27
  - In Memory of...: 100.00

Total Net Assets $19,739.25

**TOTAL LIABIL. & NET ASSETS** $19,739.25

The Year 2015 was another financially stable year for NAHS overall. Our funds continue to grow slowly thanks to our membership renewals and a few new members’ dues. The H.E.R.E. chapter (Heather Enthusiasts of The Redwood Empire) again stepped up with a strong chapter presence and was responsible for much of our renewals and most of our new members!

Our expenses have been kept to a minimum once again. The printing of the Heather News Quarterly was always our largest expense, and cost cutting measures phased in over the last few years ago have had their impact. New members (and renewing members whenever possible), now receive only an electronic version of the newsletter. Karla Lortz, our past president, has generously donated the cost of printing the few remaining copies necessary for archive copies for libraries, and for those members without reliable access, or in a few cases, no access at all, to the internet. Going forward into 2016, there will be significant ( and hopefully temporary) additional expenses for production and layout of the Heather News Quarterly until a new volunteer Editor can be found.

Respectfully submitted,

John Calhoun
Treasurer, NAHS
**Calendar Spring 2016**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mar. 2</td>
<td>VIHS general meeting, home of Elaine Rogers.</td>
<td>Info: Earl Jenstad, <a href="mailto:earljentad@live.com">earljentad@live.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 6</td>
<td>VIHS, to be announced</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 9</td>
<td>NEHS heather trimming and propagation workshop, Fort Tryon, Manhattan, NY.</td>
<td>Info: Mary Matwey, <a href="mailto:pmatvey@stny.rr.com">pmatvey@stny.rr.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 30</td>
<td>NEHS heather trimming, Heritage Museum &amp; Gardens, Sandwich, MA</td>
<td>Info: Mary Matwey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 18</td>
<td>VIHS, visit to Malcolm Ho You Peonies, Saltair.</td>
<td>Info: Earl Jenstad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 8</td>
<td>VIHS guided visit to Hatley Park.</td>
<td>Info: Earl Jenstad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aug. 10–13</td>
<td>NAHS Conference, Eureka, CA.</td>
<td>Info: Chris House, <a href="mailto:chrisalis@suddenlink.net">chrisalis@suddenlink.net</a>; heathershere.org</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oct. 5</td>
<td>VIHS, Companion plants for Heathers, Sylvan United Church.</td>
<td>Info: Earl Jenstad</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nov. 2</td>
<td>VIHS annual general meeting.</td>
<td>Info: Earl Jenstad</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dec. 7</td>
<td>VIHS Christmas luncheon.</td>
<td>Info: Earl Jenstad</td>
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<td>2017</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Feb. 1</td>
<td>VIHS meeting, tubie test and study session, Mill Bay, BC.</td>
<td>Info: Earl Jenstad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feb. 17</td>
<td>HERE winter meeting.</td>
<td>Info: Maria Krenek, <a href="mailto:glenmarheather@yahoo.com">glenmarheather@yahoo.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mar. 4</td>
<td>HERE winter workshop, Eureka.</td>
<td>Info: Maria Krenek, <a href="mailto:glenmarheather@yahoo.com">glenmarheather@yahoo.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mar. 25</td>
<td>VIHS plant sale, Farmers’ Institute, Cobble Hill, BC.</td>
<td>Details: Earl Jenstad</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
NAHS Board of Directors

PRESIDENT
Karla Lortz, 502 E. Haskell Hill Rd., Shelton WA 98584, USA
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reedba@onid.orst.edu

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Janice Leinwebber – Slide librarian for United States
Elaine Scott – Slide librarian for Canada

Ella May Wulff – Membership, Storefront manager and copy
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Editor position vacant

TO GET PUBLISHED IN HEATHER NEWS QUARTERLY
Contact Ella May Wulff, 2299 Wooded Knolls Dr., Philomath, OR 97370 USA, 541-929-6272, ewulff@peak.org

MEMBERSHIP
Membership includes an electronic subscription to the HNQ, participation in Society meetings and elections, borrowing privileges for books and slide programs, discounts from the Storefront and some nurseries.

DUES
$15/year including electronic newsletter; $11/yr. surcharge for print copy

REMIT TO
John Calhoun, treasurer (address above).

Chapter dues may be included when paying NAHS dues by adding $10/year for HERE one person, OHS, VIHS; $15/year for HERE family membership and NEHS.

TO BORROW BOOKS FROM THE NAHS LIBRARY
Contact Maria Krenek, 7430 Myrtle Ave., Eureka, CA 95503, 707-443-9472, glenmarheather@yahoo.com

TO BORROW SLIDE PROGRAMS
In USA, contact Janice Leinwebber, 8268 S. Gribble Rd., Canby, OR 97013, 503-263-2428, hheather@canby.com
In Canada, contact Elaine Scott, 2836 Oceanside Lane, Mill Bay, BC V0R 2P2, 250-743-0965, TheScottRogers@aol.com