

## **CAN I GROW HEATHER WHERE I LIVE?**

**Heather is drought tolerant—once established.**

**They must be well watered their first year.**

**They need half day to full sun—can take the heat east of the mountains if on irrigation.**

**They ALL like acid soil, SOME tolerate neutral to alkaline soil. Western Washington has acid soil.**

**They do not like clay soil—must be amended or raised above it.**

**For potted plants, Ericas are the easiest to grow. Use an acid soil pH mix such Whitney Farms Azalea/Camellia/Rhody mix.**

**Annual pruning keeps them from getting bare and woody.**

**Fertilize with acid fertilizer when planted - never again if doing well.**

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**Most are frost hardy to well below 0° F. Exceptions are the South African Cape heaths (to 28° F) and tree heaths (10° F).**

**Most are small evergreen shrubs that average 6” to 2’ by 18” to 2’ wide in about 4 years. Tree heaths grow to 5-6’.**

**Deer are not attracted to heather—unless they are well fertilized.**

**The difference between a heath and a heather? Heath are in the genus *Erica*. They have needle-like foliage. Heather is in the genus *Calluna vulgaris*. They have more scale-like foliage.**

## Planting Instructions

The following is from the North American Heather Society Heather News #68, by Greta Waterman.

**Site:** Heathers should have at least one-half day of sun. [With gold and orange/red foliage, put in full winter sun.]

**Soil Preparation:** If soil is predominantly clay, remove soil to depth of one foot. [OR plant in raised beds if drainage is a concern.] Replace with equal amounts of garden loam and peat moss. NO lime. Most heaths and heathers require an acid soil pH. Other additives to soil can be needles and shredded oak leaves. Prepare the soil to a depth of 1 to 1 1/2 ft. Do not add artificial or natural fertilizers (i.e. manure) to the soil. [We plant ours with bone meal and compost or a bit of rhododendron fertilizer.]

**Planting:** Water soil so it is moist to the touch down to 1 to 1 1/2 ft. Peat moss is difficult to moisten so be sure it is wet. Arrange potted plants on garden site before planting. Plants should be placed 18"-24" apart. Plant heathers in groups of at least 3 per variety (odd numbers seem to work better). Arrange according to ultimate height at maturity. Using a trowel, make a hole a little larger than root ball. [Do not cut, slice or butterfly the root ball - you will kill them. Score the sides with a stick.] If it is heavily rooted, pull roots apart [gently] before planting [or score the root ball]. Place in hole so that bottom of foliage is a little above soil level. Fill in around plants and firm soil around plants.

**Mulching:** Mulching the heather garden is extremely important. Place a 2" layer of pine needles or bark chips around the plants and entire planting area. Push the mulch under the foliage so that it is touching the major stem of the plant.

**Watering:** [Soak your plants immediately upon arrival until all air bubbles stop for a few minutes.] Water plants after placing the mulch. Water thoroughly. Check daily for moisture. Watering newly planted heather is crucial. [NOTE: Our web site has a paper on watering requirements for your heather garden over the first five years. Check for more information.]

**Winter:** [No need to cover plants in USDA Zones 7 and warmer unless there is an Arctic front approaching and plants will be damaged. Cover with cardboard, blankets, etc. for sudden emergency cold weather. For the colder USDA Zones 4 and 5,] the heathers should be covered for the winter. Cover as soon as the ground has started to freeze (usually around the end of November). Do not cover while the ground is soft. The following material can be used: pine needles, evergreen boughs, hay [white row cover blanket - Harvest Guard]. Completely cover the heathers with mulching material. Pine needles nestled down into the plants provide good protection. If using pine needles, throw boughs or sticks on top to hold them in place. Just tips should be showing.

**Spring:** The mulch should be [gradually] removed from the tops and sides of the plants the second or third week in April. Give them a week to adjust to temperatures. Spring is a good time to add new plants or replace dead plants.

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### Directions

\*From Tacoma take Hwy 16 from I5, exit at Purdy. Left at 1st light onto Key Peninsula Hwy. Right onto Elgin-Clifton Rd (SR 302). Follow the signs to Shelton. Left at 'T' in Allyn onto Hwy 3. Left on Pickering Rd (about 10 mi.), we are 1/2 mile on the left adjacent to Olympic Bakery.

\*North-enders may want to take the ferry from either Edmonds or downtown Seattle. Follow Hwy 3 south and exit towards Shelton at Gorst with Hwy 3. Left on Pickering Rd (about 15 mi. south of Belfair), we are 1/2 mile on the left.

\*From Olympia take HWY 101. Take the 101 Exit to Shelton. Take the first Shelton Hwy 3 exit. Follow Hwy 3 through Shelton towards Bremerton. Turn right on Pickering Rd. (about 10 mi.) we are 1/2 mile on the left adjacent to Olympic Bakery—a great place to have lunch.