

Heaths (*Erica*) and Heathers (*Calluna*)

- *Provide year-round color*
- *Bloom for weeks in late autumn to late spring*
- *Are pest- and disease-resistant*
- *Prefer nutrient-poor sandy soil*
- *Require little maintenance*

Heaths and heathers come in many varieties that offer year-round color from both flower and foliage. Both are suitable as ground covers or to add color in rock gardens or shrub borders. Many change color throughout the year, with some having spring tip growth in shades of pink, yellow, bronze, gold, red. Combining different heath and heather cultivars within a planting makes it possible to have a colorful display of flowering plants throughout the year. Flower colors are white and shades of pink, red and purple.

Most cultivars are low-growing with a bushy or spreading habit, and flower from late autumn to late spring, some lasting several months. Heaths and heathers can be effectively used on their own, in low-lying foreground groups to shrubs or conifers, or with ornamental grasses.

General Care:

Heaths and heathers will tolerate partial shade but will flower best in 4 or more hours of sun. In our harsh climate, they often benefit from being planted north of the house where they are protected from midday winter sun, but in an otherwise sunny spot.

Acid soil is preferred by most cultivars but there are lime-tolerant varieties. *Erica cinerea* and *Erica darleyensis* will tolerate alkaline conditions. Sandy soils with good drainage are ideal provided that they are amended with some organic matter. Heaths and heathers should not be heavily fertilized. They should not be planted too deeply.

Like most plants, newly planted heaths and heathers should not be allowed to dry out and will require regular summer watering until well established, after which most are quite drought tolerant. After planting, they can be mulched to suppress weeds and aid in moisture retention. A once-a-year pruning to shape the plants and to remove spent flowers is usually all the maintenance required.

Feed in early spring with a light dusting of fertilizer for acid-loving plants, scattered on the ground as far as the branches spread. Do not cultivate the soil around plants--their roots are shallow and easily damaged; instead, mulch heaths and heathers with 1 to 2 inches of chunky peat moss, wood chips, sawdust, or ground bark.

Annual trimming will keep heaths in good shape, promote flowering and prolong the life of the plant. To keep heather plants bushy and stimulate blossoming, prune lightly in early to mid-spring before growth really starts, cutting back to strong shoots just below the flower cluster.

Bloom times:

Erica (Heath):

Erica hybrida, *Erica carnea*, *Erica darleyensis*: December to April

Erica vagans: July to September

Erica tetralix: July to November

Calluna (Heather):

Calluna vulgaris: June to November