



Uncanoonuc Mt. Perennials

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HEATHS & HEATHERS

“Heathers” is a term gardeners often use to refer to plants in the genera *Erica* and *Calluna*. For the most part they are low growing, evergreen shrubs (woody perennials). They are as popular for their varied and beautiful foliage textures and colors as for their showy flowers. They can be effective as ground covers, work well in a mixed border or rock garden, and are dramatic showcased in a garden by themselves. To tell them apart look closely:

HEATHS (*Erica carnea* cultivars)

- * Needle-like foliage that comes straight out from the stem
- * Petals are fused into an urn-shaped blossom
- * Bloom in late winter to early spring

HEATHERS (*Calluna vulgaris* cultivars)

- * Scale-like foliage that overlaps and hugs the stem
- * Bell-shaped flowers are deeply divided
- * Bloom at various times from late spring to fall

GETTING THEM GOING: ESTABLISHMENT

A spot in full sun is best, though heaths can tolerate light shade. An acid, well-drained (even sandy) soil is ideal. Working large amounts of pre-moistened peatmoss into the planting bed is recommended. Set the plants at the same or slightly deeper level as they were growing in the pot. Water your new plants deeply and make sure they receive ample water during their first couple of years. A two inch layer of an organic mulch (like bark mulch or pine needles) is highly recommended. Mulching helps keep the soil moist and the weeds down.

KEEPING THEM GOING: MAINTENANCE

Heaths and heathers are low maintenance plants. They are drought resistant once established, not bothered by diseases or insects and pretty much deer-proof. They are not heavy feeders. A very light dose of an acid-type, granular fertilizer in early spring will be ample. If you forget, they'll be fine. Pruning is a simple, once a year task that is important to maintain thick, vigorous growth. Prune both heaths and heathers promptly after bloom cutting just below the faded flowers. Like other evergreens they may “burn” or desiccate during the winter. The easiest (and cleanest) way to protect them is to use landscape fabric pins to secure a layer of burlap over the plants. We pin the burlap in mid-October and remove it as soon as the snow melts. Refer to our *‘Mulch and the Perennials Garden’* tip sheet for alternative ways to winter mulch.