

Heathers – Color for All Seasons

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Heathers represent one of the most versatile components in Pacific Northwest gardens. Not only are they well adapted to the climate and soil but they can also provide color in every season of the year.

The term “heather” is often used to refer to several different plant types including true heathers (genus: *Calluna*), heaths (genus: *Erica*), Irish heaths (genus: *Daboecia*) and mountainheaths (genus: *Phyllodoce*). Heaths are typically lower growing and more compact than true heathers. They also spread outwards at a faster rate. Some heaths, however, can grow up to 10 to 20 feet high; these species, often called “tree heaths” due to their spectacular size, include *Erica arborea*, *Erica lusitanica*, *Erica australis* and *Erica terminalis*.

Heathers (including all of the above plant types) flourish in cool, moist conditions and in soils which are slightly acidic. As a result, they are good companions to azaleas and rhododendrons which also thrive in acidic soils.

Heathers grow best in peaty, acid soils but will tolerate all soils except those with high lime content. Heathers generally like full sun (at least 6 hours of sun each day); however, Irish heaths tolerate part shade and are well suited to garden areas that transition between sun and shade.

The best planting times are March through May and then late September through late November. Young plants should be planted with the foliage almost touching the soil surface. Space plants 12 to 18 inches apart to allow for growth. Draw back mulch from the main stem.

Plant heathers in informal groups without straight lines. Bold plantings of 3 or more of a single cultivar give a good overall effect, but single plants, when chosen to contrast or complement surrounding plants, can look attractive in a small garden.

Watering is essential during spring and throughout dry spells, especially in the first year after planting. Staking or support is not required for these plants with the exception of tree heaths.

Propagation of heathers can be achieved by tip cuttings or “layering,” a process accomplished by bending a low-growing, flexible stem to the ground, covering part of it with soil and allowing the buried stem to grow roots.

Because heathers have different growth behaviors and bloom times, be sure you know the characteristics of a particular cultivar before buying it. (See sidebar for suggested cultivars.)

Heathers are low-maintenance and deer-resistant. For easy-care year-round color, add some heathers to your garden!

SIDE BAR

To provide color for all seasons, consider planting the following heathers in your garden:

<u>Name</u>	<u>Flower color</u>	<u>Bloom time</u>
<i>Erica x darleyensis</i> 'Kramer's Rote'	magenta	January to April
<i>Erica carnea</i> 'Schneekuppe'	white	January to March
<i>Calluna vulgaris</i> 'Spring Cream'	creamy white	June to September
<i>Calluna vulgaris</i> 'County Wicklow'	pink	July to September
<i>Calluna vulgaris</i> 'Corbett's Red'	deep red	August to October
<i>Calluna vulgaris</i> 'Golden Elena'	pink flowers with gold to bronze leaves	August to December
<i>Daboecia cantabrica</i> 'Purple Bell'	purple	June to October
<i>Phyllodoce aleutica</i>	green-yellow globe	April to June

