

HEATHER CULTURE IN BRIEF

Heathers do best if they are started from young plants, 2" to 4" pot size (preferred) or gallons. They need a well-drained, friable soil that is not too rich but high in organic matter, such as compost or rotted fir bark. All will do well in acidic soil conditions, but a few are tolerant of alkaline soils.

Unless your garden soil is extremely nutrient deficient, do not fertilize your heathers. They will soon establish a symbiotic relationship with soil fungi that will provide all the nutrients they require. Potted heathers do require occasional fertilizing.

A full-sun location is preferred for best bloom, though some species will do well in partial shade, especially if they receive sun for at least half a day. Yellow foliage cultivars may burn in full sunlight and thus do better with dappled shade or with morning sun only.

Planting trick: Soak pots in a bucket of water until they are thoroughly saturated before planting into the ground to the depth they were growing in the pot. If new white roots are showing in the root ball, it is not necessary to disturb the roots when planting. If roots are brown and pot bound, "butterfly" the root ball.

Water in well, and keep watered until regular winter rains begin. The rainy season is an excellent time to plant heathers, the earlier the better. Regular watering the first summer after planting is crucial, and heathers need frequent watering for at least their first four summers. After that, you can water less frequently. A two-inch mulch helps to retain soil moisture.

No heather can stand to go completely dry. Heathers are drought tolerant once established but must have some water during dry spells. A dry heather is a dead heather.

When irrigating during hot spells, water early or late in the day or at night. The combination of hot and wet, fortunately rare on the coast, encourages fungal problems. Water well—an inch—then let them dry pretty well between irrigations.

Calluna plants MUST be pruned every year (spring or fall, not both), just below the previous season's dead flowers. Otherwise, they get leggy with bare patches of stem where the flowers were. Pruning encourages branching and more flowers. Do not cut

into old dead wood with no leaves. It will not sprout. These may be pruned immediately after they finish flowering but no later than early November.

Other heathers benefit from yearly shearing, too. Prune winter/spring bloomers just before they finish blooming, before new growth begins. Prune summer bloomers in early spring, just below last year's flowers.

Questions: Contact the **Oregon Heather Society** (541) 929-6272 or ewulff@peak.org