

The Dodecatheon

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Newsletter of the Delaware Valley Chapter of the North American Rock Garden Society

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Erica at Fort Tryon

Tips on Buying or Seeing Heath and Heather

Fort Tryon Park in Manhattan (<http://forttryonparktrust.org>) and Leonard J. Buck Garden in Far Hills, NJ (www.somersetcountyparks.org) are two nearby locations to view these plants.

Plants can be purchased locally at Jane's nursery, Hickory Hill (<http://stores.hickoryhillheathandheather.com/StoreFront.bok>) or from Heaths and Heather in Shelton, Washington via mail order (www.heathsandheathers.com).

Probably the best book for those in our climate is Gardening with Hardy Heathers by David Small and Ella May T. Wulff, 2007 from Timber Press.

The Northeast Heather Society has an annual conference and dues are \$15 (<http://www.northamericanheathersoc.org/Site4/nearest.html>).

Informative websites include www.northamericanheathersoc.org and www.heathersociety.org.uk.

Heath and Heather: From the Moors to the Mid-Atlantic

Presented on April 17, 2010 by Jane Murphy

Reported by Tammy Harkness

Jane Murphy, of Hickory Hill Heath and Heather in Oxford, PA presented an informative and interesting overview of the botany, beauty and care of these lovely plants. She explained that she and her husband started growing them in the 1990s after seeing them at Longwood Gardens. They learned how to propagate them at a Northeast Heather Society New England conference in Cape Cod. They retired in December 2006 and opened Hickory Hill the next spring in 2007.

Jane explained that she is not a botanist but has completed Master Garden training. But as is the case for many of us, she developed a passion and sometimes an obsession for plants.



In the Family Ericaceae one finds the genus erica (heath), with many species, and calluna (heather), with just one species (*C. vulgaris*). There are over 1100 named cultivars of *Calluna vulgaris*, with foliage ranging from gold to mid to dark green. Heather are native to the British Islands and Europe (we saw examples of them in Scandinavia and Sweden) where they provide beauty on the moors by the sea and forage for the sheep. The largest collection of heathers in Europe can be found at Cherrybank Gardens in Scotland (photo, above). Heather flowers from July to October, and with snow cover for protection, these plants are hardy to zone 3.

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Where to Start?

By Sharee Solow

When you have a small yard that needs one of two trees removed due to disease it can really throw a gardener into a tailspin. One door from the SEPTA train station, half of my front yard is 12' x 15' and, until a couple years ago, was covered by an unusually fragrant plum tree and shady perennial bed. In two hours, the diseased tree was out and a couple men with a truckload of stone, sand, and gravel were learning how to build a rock garden with me. But this risky endeavor didn't happen without homework. I never had a rock garden before and the numerous passersby coming home from work were really curious.

My first instinct was to replace the tree to preserve my shade bed but I had just been to the Betty Ford Alpine Garden with the International Plant Propagator Conference and really liked their collection. I realized that this was my chance to have full sun plants for the first time and using small plants meant I could have greater diversity (ie. do more shopping). Touring the Denver Botanic Garden with Panayoti Kelaidis to view his extensive displays made me think this was too complicated to undertake.

On another field trip to a remote location I saw a wonderful stone stack garden display by a hobbyist who drew material from his headstone carving business and my faith was restored. I followed his advice and dug the existing site about a foot down to set a stack-stone wall along the paving edges, mounding the planting mixture a foot high or more with larger stones set or layered into this heap. It was not very special looking so this is when you need someone to tell you it

looks good. I haven't any vertically stacked pieces because they were too unwieldy for me to handle so I'm saving that technique for a trough. If you can't lift it comfortably in and out of the car you'll never be able to place it properly in the garden.

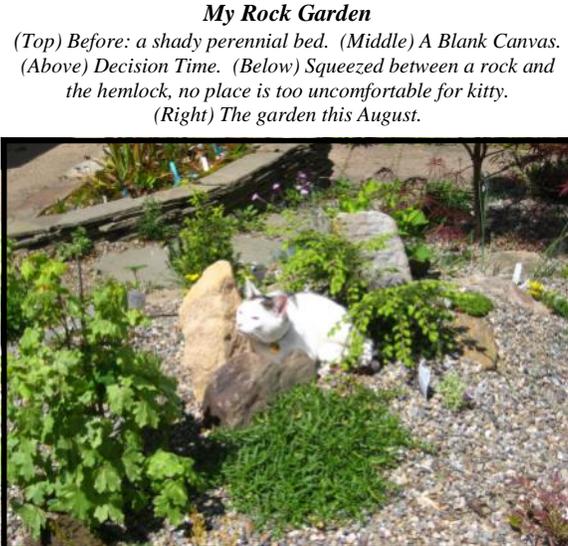
For plants, I started with my trip to Plant Delights and Big Bloomers (both North Carolina), Broken Arrow (Connecticut), Meadowbrook Farm, and Marano's Ft. Washington with great success. Right away I had some favorite new flowers. With glowing, poppy-like magenta flowers, *Phemeranthus calycinus* has bloomed from spring to fall and set seed along the way so I may have some for the plant exchange. *Ilex crenata* 'Dwarf Pagoda' makes a good companion shrub to the equally small-leaved perennials like *Sedum album* 'Black Pearl' or *Phlox x procumbens variegata*.

I liked *Dianthus simulans* in the nurseries so much that I forgot I had it and bought it twice (Don't tell me you haven't done that!). A couple things that probably aren't supposed to be there but seem to be getting along are *Iris odaesanensis* and *Morus alba* 'Nuclear Blast'. The iris belongs in woodlands but it likes having its dry roots clear of our wintery wet-clay while the mulberry would be too big if it weren't for my kitten biting it back to eight inches for me when I planted it.

The *Aster ericoides* 'Snow Flurry' seen in the photo (p. 45) is a bit too thrilled to be there and will be cut completely back after it stops blooming around mid-October. As a tough plant that should be more available on the market, this aster is perfect in difficult landscape sites because all the branches send out



My Sources of Inspiration (From Top)
Denver Botanic Garden
Montreal Rock Garden
Betty Ford
The Wisley saxifrage collection



roots as it spreads. This also makes it a nice pass-along plant for your butterfly garden or native-plant friends.

There are no secrets to having a niche-habitat garden and it doesn't have to involve anything complicated. You just have to try. Garden Societies of all sorts are accessible to help beginners expand their gardening experiences with success and maintain your enthusiasm through the failures.

Last month in England, I saw fantastic displays of individual plants, troughs, slopes, and walls at the Wisley rock garden. It showed how incredibly adaptable we need to be as gardeners when considering new planting places—the plants don't need to adapt to us. Take a problem area and exploit its potential based on the existing conditions. That is where I begin when solving all my garden design problems and it will work for anyone. Visit new spaces keep your eyes and mind open, and the answer will reveal itself to you. Relax and let creativity happen.

My rock garden is so low-maintenance that it gives me time to keep trying to learn the

art of Bonsai. I've done some ruthless pruning and highly recommend it. As a landscape designer with degrees in landscape architecture and horticulture, I enjoy visiting Japanese and Chinese gardens both here and overseas. This style is only one of many seen in the digital designs I complete for contractors in addition to creating and presenting lectures that focus on perennials, design, marketing, and travel.



Phemeranthus calycinus, my new favorite plant

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Sharee's credentials include: American Society of Landscape Architects, Pennsylvania Certified Horticulturist, Pennsylvania Nursery and Landscape Association, Garden Writers Association, Perennial Plants Association, and Association of Professional Landscape Designers.



My Rock Garden

(Top) Before: a shady perennial bed. (Middle) A Blank Canvas. (Above) Decision Time. (Below) Squeezed between a rock and the hemlock, no place is too uncomfortable for kitty. (Right) The garden this August.