

Heathers & Heaths

A Garden Guide

Planting and Growing

Heathers are acid loving (5.5 – 6.5 pH), slow growing, drought tolerant, woody evergreens. Their height ranges from 6" - 4'; their spread varies from 10" - 3'. Once established, little maintenance is required, except yearly pruning.



Heathers generally refer to a group of plants that belong to the family Ericaceae, containing the genus *Calluna* (Heathers), the genus *Erica* (Heaths), and more. Both *Calluna* and *Erica* can be grown in Western North Carolina. *Calluna* blooms in summer/fall, foliage is flat and scalelike; *Erica* blooms in winter/spring, and foliage is needlelike. They grow in acidic, low-fertility areas.

Planting Instructions:

In most instances, our soil pH is ideal for *Calluna* and *Erica*. However, our heavy clay soils require considerable amending. We recommend 1 part clay, 1½ parts Soil conditioner, and ½ part Permatil. Don't add sand, as it tends to turn clay into cement. This mixture needs to be at least 12 inches deep, to allow for good drainage. *Calluna* and *Erica* don't like wet feet. Another solution would be to build raised beds with the same soil mixture.

Since these plants are acid loving, do not add lime. Only lightly fertilize once - when planting. Use a low nitrogen dry granular fertilizer for acid loving plants.

Sun:

Calluna and *Erica* need at least six hours of sun per day.

Planting:

Plant *Calluna* and *Erica* in at least groups of three for optimum texture and color. Stagger plants so they don't look like soldiers in a row. When you plant, think of height, spread, color, and texture. Arrange your pots with plants before you dig the holes. This will give you an idea of how they will look in the ground and allow you to make changes without having to take plants out of the ground.



Once you have decided on the position of the plants, dig a hole 2x - 3x larger than the root ball. If it is pot bound, loosen the root ball. If the roots are a solid mass, soak the roots in water and gently prise apart. Make a small mound and place the plant over it with the roots to the side. Fill the hole. When planting Callunas and Ericas, plant them so that 1/4 of the root ball is above the hole and fill in around the root ball to form a mound.

Planting under trees, even with six hours of sun, causes problems. Tree roots rob water and nutrients from the Callunas and Ericas, leading to poor health and eventual death.

Mulching:

It is very important to continuously mulch. It retains moisture, keeps the soil cool, and prevents soil erosion. Use a 2" layer of Pine bark or Pine needles around the plants and entire planting area. Avoid using hardwood mulch, which can raise the soil pH.

Watering:

Callunas and *Ericas* don't like wet feet, but the roots need moisture. They are drought tolerant once established, but do not allow them to fully dry out. Freshly planted plants need to be watered. Soak the ground, not the foliage. Make sure that water penetrates the soil down to the root ball. The best time to water is in the morning so that any water that gets on the foliage evaporates. This reduces the chance of fungal problems. Once plants are established, you need only to water during dry periods.

Pruning:

Prune *Calluna* in spring, prune *Erica* after they bloom. Use a pair of sharp clippers. Cut to a point just below the bottom of the flowers on the stems. Do not cut into the old wood.

Pruning will greatly improve the appearance of your plants and bring about better growth and flowering.

Version 2.1 Mar 21



76 Monticello Road Weaverville, NC 28787
828-645-3937 <https://reemscreek.com/>

