Cover Story

This month’s cover photo of heather was taken recently by Penderite Joanne Ens on her Pender property. Heather was originally planted on the property by Ens’ husband, Stan, who passed away in July 2019. In Scotland, heather traditionally blooms in late summer, and the flowers traditionally mean admiration, protection, and good luck. The latter attribute was popularized by Queen Victoria who admired the Scots as well as, in her words, “the romance and the wild loveliness” of their country. Many believe that heather is the national plant of Scotland, but in fact Scotland’s national plant is the thistle...and doesn’t that say even more about the Scots?

Obviously, one glance at our heather-in-bloom cover will confirm that local heather cares not one whit about when it is supposed to bloom (see paragraph above). I wonder how Queen Victoria would feel about the fact that Pender Island’s early blooming heather makes us feel even luckier than the heather-viewing Scots.

This tough plant seems to have an excellent reputation, credentials, and certainly a worthy champion in Queen Victoria, but frankly I worry about its Latin name, Calluna vulgaris. I know, I know, in the past I have been cavalier, maybe even casual and certainly inaccurate in ferreting out the precise meaning of Latin names of various animals and plants. However, in the case of heather I really am concerned with just what level of “vulgaris” is being referenced by that second Latin word! Perhaps, like my father, those Latin guys would be referring to the heather plant’s tendency to talk when its mouth was full. That was almost the height of “vulgaris” to Dad. Fearing that heather had something more in its past that is really “vulgaris,” our Research Department did an exhaustive background check into heather. The check found no accusations of heather ever wearing stripes with plaids at the same time, nor did the researchers find any hint of heather’s exchanging off-colour jokes. Based on the Research Department’s investigation, I am confident in assuring the reader that, other than being quite jealous of her younger brother Angus, Heather has no major personality flaws more serious than those listed above.

Enjoy all the Pender heather as you follow all the COVID-19 restrictions and vaccination guidelines. Stay safe. The writer and Research Department would like to acknowledge the assistance of the Qmile Group and Patrick Breen CPN (Certified Plant Nerd), *oregonstate.edu*.

Mike Wiley