

SAXIFLORA

PLATE 1

Daboecia cantabrica
(*Ericaceae*)

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Irish Heath

There is no question as to the desirability of heaths in the rock garden, especially the larger garden, in which an area may be given over entirely to these highly ornamental plants. Even in smaller ones, however, the Irish heath is much to be desired; its individual flowers are the largest of the hardy heaths, and its long flowering season, from June until frost, makes it of especial value. Furthermore, its attractive low growth and neat ever-green foliage are much in its favor. Many specialists consider it the most choice and beautiful of the heather-like shrubs, and indeed its slender flower spires, hung with white or rosy purple bells, make a lasting impression upon one seeing them for the first time, and the impression becomes more lasting with familiarity.

While the typical form has rosy purple flowers, there are several equally attractive varieties. Probably the finest form is the variety *alba*, with more upright growth, somewhat darker foliage, and larger and more freely produced pure white flowers. The variety *atropurpurea* has more darkly colored flowers, the variety *rosea*, pink flowers, and the variety *bicolor*, or *versicolor* as it is sometimes called, has purple, white, and pink and white striped flowers all on the same plant. There is also a dwarf variety, *nana*, with smaller and more narrow leaves.

The plant is native in County Mayo and the Connemara district of Ireland, Southwestern France, Northern Spain and the Azores, a seemingly strange distribution, but one shared by a number of other plants, and the source of much theoretical discussion.

It is not an especially difficult plant to grow, requiring the same lime-free soil preferred by the majority of ericaceous plants and, as with the heaths and heathers, benefitting by a good mulch of well-rotted peat. In the northern parts of this country it requires a somewhat sheltered location, as it is not of such iron-clad hardiness as its cousins, the true heaths, and the heather. Propagation is readily effected by cuttings of well-ripened wood taken preferably during the period from November to January. An equal mixture of fine leafmold and sand is the best medium, and the cuttings should be made quite firm. The soil must never be allowed to become dry during the rooting process. Propagation by seed, which is usually freely formed, is equally easy, the treatment being the same as for any ericaceous plant.

The Irish heath is a low shrub with glandular-hairy branchlets, occasionally reaching two feet in height, the growth spreading or upright according to variety. The leaves are alternate, evergreen, ovate or elliptic, with an abruptly pointed tip and revolute margins, dark green and shining above, white-woolly beneath, one-fourth to one-half inch long. The inflorescence is a slender raceme six to seven inches long (up to twelve inches in var. *alba*) and glandular-hairy. The bell-shaped, nodding flowers are one-third to one-half inch long, rosy purple, purple, pink, white, or pink and white striped, the calyx small, four-parted. The eight stamens are concealed within the flower. The capsule is four-valved with many small, roundish rough-surfaced seeds.

E. J. ALEXANDER

Vaccinium cantabricum Hudson, Fl. Angl. ed. 1. 143. 1762.

Menziesia polifolia Jussieu, Ann. Mus. Par. 1: 55. 1802

Daboecia polifolia D. Don, Edinb. N. Phil. Jour. 17: 160. 1834.

Daboecia cantabrica K. Koch, Dendrol. 2: 132. 1872.