

## **Ledum groenlandicum and Chamaedaphne calyculata**

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*Ledum groenlandicum* and *Chamaedaphne calyculata* are plants native to North America in damp, boggy situations. Although, in my experience, I find that *Ledum* tends to like areas that are not quite as wet as those where *Chamaedaphne* can thrive. Both of these plants are little known to most nurserymen. I'm sure quite a few nurserymen know them only as weeds in container mixes containing Canadian peat. *Ledum groenlandicum* (Labrador tea) tends to stay further North than *Chamaedaphne*. It is primarily native from Greenland across Canada, south into Washington State, and on the East Coast down into the mountains of Pennsylvania. It will, however, tolerate warmer climates if given enough moisture and does quite well in our nursery in Connecticut. Labrador tea gets about 2 to 4 ft high and about the same size in width. The leaves are evergreen; however, in some winters they can be damaged to the point where we might only call it persistent leaved. The flowers are perfect white corymbs covering the plant in late June in most northern areas — perhaps late May in the southern borders of its range. Propagation in the nursery is quite simple. At Summer Hill we take the cuttings in late January, wound them, treat them with Dip 'n Grow (1 : 15, v/v) and stick them in a peat and perlite (1 : 1, v/v) mixture with bottom heat and minimal mist. They root quite readily for hardwood cuttings, and you can expect very close to 100% rooting. After the cuttings are rooted, we flat them in a peat and perlite mix, and they produce the first flush of growth in the greenhouse. After shearing this back a bit, they are planted in 1-gal containers in June. We consider the plants salable after two summers, and those that are not sold at that point are kicked up into 2-gal containers to be grown on for 1 more year. The market for *Ledum* is not great as most people do not know the plant; however, it is quite an effective plant for damp areas. Although it is not of great ornamental value, it is quite a pretty thing when it is in bloom. As far as I know, there are no named selections of *Ledum* in the trade. The plants we grow originate from cuttings I took along Route 16 in northern Maine, not far from the New Hampshire border.

*Chamaedaphne calyculata*, leatherleaf, is a plant that is very valuable for wet, boggy areas. However, at least in my estimation, it is an uglier plant than *Ledum* — small evergreen leaves that are a poor green in the summer and turn brown in the winter with a plant habit that can be rather open, scraggly, and unappealing. It does have white bell-shaped flowers in the spring, somewhat similar to blueberries, and at the time of blooming, can be quite an attractive plant. Its range goes much further south than *Ledum*, probably as far as Georgia in the cool areas of the state. I have observed a rather good-looking specimen only about 50 ft from a salt pond in Rhode Island which leads me to believe that, at least, some members of the species are quite salt tolerant.

At Summer Hill, we propagate leatherleaf about the same time as Labrador tea and treat them about the same way. However, you must be careful to take cuttings with plenty of vegetative buds below the flower buds at the end of the stem. We take cuttings the end of January, wound the cuttings, treat them with Dip 'n Grow (1 : 15, v/v), and stick them in a peat and perlite mix (1 : 1, v/v) with minimal mist. The

rooted cuttings are put into flats of peat and perlite. Their first growth, and perhaps the second, in the greenhouse are sheared, and they are planted into 1-gal containers in early June. They grow to a salable size in 2 years, being sheared several times in the process. Even with shearing, however, it is difficult to produce a nice, full *Chamaedaphne*. As with *Ledum*, some plants are kicked up into 2-gal containers for another year.

Now comes the interesting and, I believe, valuable part of my talk. A few years ago, Tom Dilatush, who I'm sure most of you know, sent me seed and some cuttings of *C. calyculata* from a population in Dare County, North Carolina on the Virginia border. This area has a rather large population of *Chamaedaphne* that is far more compact than the type plant. While some of the seedlings show some promise, we have not yet selected any of them for propagation; however, four of the cuttings have produced plants that are very interesting to us — tight, full, beautiful little plants that could be valuable additions to moist or wet areas in the landscape. These produce plants that are as full, tidy, and as aesthetically pleasing as many small leaf rhododendrons; however, they are not susceptible to *Phytophthora cinnamomi* (rhododendron root rot). Three of these selections bloom profusely, giving the plants a dwarf *Pieris japonica*-type aspect when blooming in late May and early June. Tom and I feel that these selections, and perhaps one or two more from the seedling group, have great promise for ornamental plantings in damp areas unsuitable for azalea or rhododendrons. We haven't named them yet; however, if anyone is interested, please write to me and we will be more than glad to send you some cuttingwood after we've made our final selections and have given them names.