



Corydalis 'Craigton Blue'

I was so pleased to see the sweetly scented Corydalis 'Craigton Blue' growing happily in Gothenburg Botanic Gardens last week. I now have the pleasure of enjoying it in our own garden where we grow it in a number of situations both in shade and full sun. Corydalis 'Craigton Blue' is a hybrid between Corydalis omeiana, the seed parent, and C. elata - it is intermediate between the two plants but seems to be growable in a wider range of climate zones as I have had reports that it succeeds in gardens where neither of the parents do well.



Corydalis capitata seeds

To raise hybrids you first have to obtain seeds and it is important to keep a careful eye on Corydalis seed pods in particular because they give very little warning of when they are ripe and, when ripe, they shed the seed quickly.



Corydalis capitata seeds

This close up detail of *Corydalis capitata* seeds and the capsule show how the seed is dispersed explosively as the sides of the capsule suddenly recoil, hurling the seeds out as they go. While I have allowed some of these seeds to self sow around the plants I have collected some to disperse around other garden beds where I would like to establish this plant. I hold a tray underneath the spikes as I gently roll the lower seed pods between my fingers – this can often trigger the spring load. *Corydalis* seeds are one of the bulbous seeds that I do sow immediately on collection.



Scoliopus bigelowii seeds

While not explosive in their dispersal I also have to keep a close eye on the *Scoliopus bigelowii* seed pods if I want to collect the seeds as their pods simply disintegrate.



Scoliopus bigelowii seed capsule

Unusually the growth of the seeds has split the capsule above along a seam - for some reason the seeds were growing quicker than the capsule could cope with.



Scoliopus bigelowii seeds

I often lose the Scoliopus seeds to the garden as the sides of the capsule become papery thin and shed the seeds before I notice - or slugs and snails break in eating through the capsule to the seeds. I am not clear if the snails eat the seeds or are attracted to the white eliasome that you can see attached to the seeds above – perhaps this is part of the plants' dispersal mechanism, though the eliasome is primarily intended to attract ants. Although they will survive dry storage for some months, to achieve the best germination results I prefer to sow Scoliopus seeds immediately after collection.



Erythronium sibiricum seeds

Staying on the theme of seeds that I prefer to sow as soon as they are ripe; here is some of my *Erythronium sibiricum* seed – I am so pleased to now have a number of forms of this superb species growing happily in the garden and giving me an annual harvest of seeds.



**Erythronium sibiricum
seed capsule**

The Eurasian group of *Erythroniums* also have to be watched carefully if I want to collect the seeds before they are shed into the garden.

The sides of the capsule become papery and start to wrinkle and shrink as the seams which are the last bit to remain green hold firm before suddenly losing their grip and the capsule opens, shedding the seeds quite quickly.



Crocus pulchellus seeds

I am also harvesting some Crocus seeds as the capsule slowly pushes above the gravel.

Unlike the seeds mentioned above I like to store most of my crocus seeds in packets of dry sand over the summer before sowing them in August/September. The difference being that these are seeds that are used to a period of dry summer rest while the ones mentioned above tend to be shed into a cooler moist environment in their native habitats and so do not like to be excessively dried out for long periods.



Crocus laevigatus seedlings

This is a 7cm pot of Crocus laevigatus seedlings. I sowed the seed deep in the pot last September after storing the seeds in dry sand for the summer.

It shows that the methods that I have worked out do give me the optimum results with an almost 100% germination rate.



Crocus laevigatus seedlings

I would not normally replot my bulb seedlings after only one year of growth but I wanted to see the size that the young corms had reached - plus even I felt that I had been too ambitious with how many bulbs I can get to grow in a 7cm pot !

After rubbing the young corms gently between the palms of my hands to separate them from the old dry leaves and roots I replotted them into an 11cm pot where they can remain for another two or three years until they reach flowering size.

With such a diverse genus as Crocus it is impossible to make hard and fast rules that will apply to all the species so while I store most of the seeds dry over the summer there are a few species where I like to sow the seeds fresh and one of those is Crocus vallicola.



Crocus vallicola seed and young corms

Coming from a moister habitat Crocus vallicola is one of the species that does not want to be dried out excessively in the summer and it grows well for us in open beds – for this reason I sow the seeds deeply as soon as they are ripe and stand them in open frames. Sometimes I do not get the seed collected and it is shed into the pot and germinates just under the gravel topdressing – that is where I found these young corms. They remain exposed there to the environment until, after a number of years, they eventually manage to pull themselves down below ground - that is why I sow them deeply in the pot



Fritillaria chitralensis seed pods

You can imagine how delighted I am to have some nice fat seed pods on this rare and beautiful *Fritillaria chitralensis* - but all is not exactly as it seems.



Fritillaria chitralensis seed

What initially looks like a great harvest from four fat seed pods can be deceiving.



***Fritillaria chitralensis* seed sorted**

By placing the seeds into a large seed tray and gently blowing as I shake the tray – holding it at a slight angle upwards - the lighter unfertile seeds and chaff move up the tray leaving the good seeds at the bottom. This reveals that I only have around half the crop that I thought I had. It is a great disappointment to me that despite all my best efforts my record of raising *Fritillaria chitralensis* from seeds is not a very good one as I find the germination very poor even from what appears to be good seeds.



***Fritillaria chitralensis* bulb**

I am determined to crack this problem and increase my stock of this great species so that I can have more of it but also so that I can distribute it into wider circulation.



Fritillaria chitralensis bulb cut up

To this end I am prepared to sacrifice one of my precious bulbs in an attempt to speed up the rate of increase. I have cut it into five pieces in the hope that each part will produce at least one new bulbil and if I am really lucky I may get a few bulbils from each part – of course I could fail and get nothing but at last I will have tried.



Fritillaria chitralensis bulb

After cutting up the bulb I left the pieces in the sunshine for an hour to allow the cut surfaces to dry out which I find reduces the chances of the cut segments rotting away.

I have placed the segments together, wrapped in just moist moss, into a plastic bag which is now in a dark stable environment for a few months.

For the result watch this space.....