



BULB LOG 06.....11th February 2009



Bulb houses in snow

Winter has stung us with an icy blast from the North East bringing plenty snow and frosts down to -9C in our garden- other parts of the highlands of Scotland recorded -18C last night.



Narcissus in the snow

Safe under the protection of the glass house roof the Narcissus peek out at the light and are so far unscathed by the wintry weather.

Snow on Bulb House Roof

Inside the big problem is that even less light gets through to the bulbs making them even more inclined to etiolate.

This is especially a problem when the temperature in the glasshouse is not freezing so the bulbs are still encouraged to grow.

As you can see from this picture the low sunlight has lit up a group of Narcissus that are enjoying the brief period of warmth.



Removing snow from roof

Outside the problem is very different and easily overlooked.

These glasshouse are made from relatively light weight aluminium sections and are designed to carry the weight of the structure with glass and no doubt a bit of tolerance is built in but not the additional 100kg or more of snow lying on them. Unless it is only a dusting of snow I always remove it daily to prevent overloading the structure which might cause a collapse and that would be a big problem.



Narcissus in bulb house

Once the snow is removed from the roof and when the sun shines the air temperature rises above freezing most days but on a cloudy day it stays very cold. The other problem to be very aware of if you also have relatively small glasshouses with a small volume of air is how quickly the temperature can swing. I nearly always leave the door open so that the temperature does not rise too quickly as that can be more harmful to the bulbs which are in growth than prolonged periods of cold.



Narcissus in prop house

These are the small 7 & 8 cm pots in the prop house and they are sitting on my old mist propagating unit which still has a soil warming cable in the sand plunge. I have this on a thermostatic control to come on when the sand drops

below freezing as a form of protection. All the sand plunges have soil warming cables like this which only come on to prevent the bulbs and their roots freezing completely. It is an insurance to prevent big losses in any prolonged period of sub zero temperatures and the thermostats are carefully adjusted so that the cables do not come on too soon and actually heat the bulbs. The first year I had these cables I made the mistake of setting the thermostats just above freezing which did heat the compost causing many to flower too early and that was a bigger problem. Now I have them set to come on when the temperature is zero and the sensors are either just under the pots or 2cms down in the sand plunge.



Narcissus romieuxii

It is the Narcissus that are most at risk as it can be fatal if the bulb is in frozen compost for any length of time. The last bad winter we had, I think it was around 1986, we only had one plunge with the soil warming cable and we lost all our Narcissus except for the ones on that plunge.

If you look carefully above you should recognise that there are two forms of Narcissus romieuxii – on the left is N. 'Craigton Clumper' with JCA805 on the right.



Narcissus romieuxii rifanus

Here are a few of the other forms that are just coming out.

Narcissus romieuxii rifanus is described as having upwards facing flowers with the anthers being both less tightly bunched and protruding from the corona. Notice also that the petals are longer than the corona.

This plant certainly has all those features which I think give it great charm.



Narcissus 'Craigton Gem'

Narcissus 'Craigton Gem' is one of my own selections and has many similarities to *Narcissus romieuxii rifanus* namely the flowers tend to look up and the anthers and style protrude so it may be that *rifanus* is one of the parents of this form. Look again at the length of the petals and you will see that 'Craigton Gem' has petals that are shorter than the corona.

Narcissus romieuxii x mesatlanticus

I got this bulb many years ago as *Narcissus romieuxii x mesatlanticus* and it is a very good wee plant.

It is vigorous increasing and flowering well every year without fail.

A good cross between two forms of this variable species.





Narcissus romieuxii 'Joy Bishop'



Narcissus romieuxii 'Joy Bishop' flower

A year or two ago when I showed the plant I got as *Narcissus romieuxii* 'Joy Bishop' there was much discussion as to whether it was the correct form or not. Here it is again and despite the discussions I am keeping the label as it was. *Narcissus* 'Joy Bishop' is a form of *N. romieuxii* with a lobed corona and I have found that the majority of seedlings raised from a parent with a lobed corona will also exhibit that feature to some degree or other. It is very difficult to distinguish these seedlings from one another never mind from the parents so perhaps they should just be called the lobed group.



Crocus 'Sun Spot'

A beautiful selected form of *Crocus chrysanthus*, this wee beauty will only reveal its beauty when the temperatures rises enough to open the flowers -watch this space. Then the feature that makes this form so different the black tip to the stigma is clear to see. Raised and selected at Potterton's Nursery we bought these corms from Bob Potterton when he spoke in Aberdeen last autumn. I am impressed with how many flowers rise up from three corms.



Colchicum kesselringii

Here is the first of our *Colchicum kesselringii* to push up a flower this year.

I had lost this species altogether but a friend sent me this one a few years ago and now I also have a pot with some seed raised ones that I hope should flower this year but they are going to be a bit later as they are only just coming through the gravel now.



Fritillaria carica

In the frit house things are also stirring with many green shots appearing some fat with flower buds and others too young to flower this year. It is a general rule with fritillaria that if a bulb only sends up one leaf then it will not flower as you can see in this picture the fat ones have two leaves clutching the bud



Fritillaria davisii

This pot of Fritillaria davisii are mostly young bulbs raised from the slightly larger than rice grain off sets this species produces freely.



Erythronium caucasicum

Yesss!! the first Erythronium is in advanced bud. I moved this pot of Erythronium caucasicum into the protection of the bulb house just before the snow arrived. It is perfectly hardy outside and I do have several planted in the garden but I like to have a few in a pot even if it is always more vulnerable to slugs or snails that fancy an early spring snack.



Snow drops in the snow

Back outside the well named snow drops can take any amount of this type of weather and always seem to come through unscathed. I have no doubt the Galanthophiles will be trying to name these two specimens.



Hamamelis in the snow

At first look this picture looks very faded out and white but that is exactly how the scene looked – it is only when you start to notice the bright red flowers on the Hamamelis that your eye gets orientated.



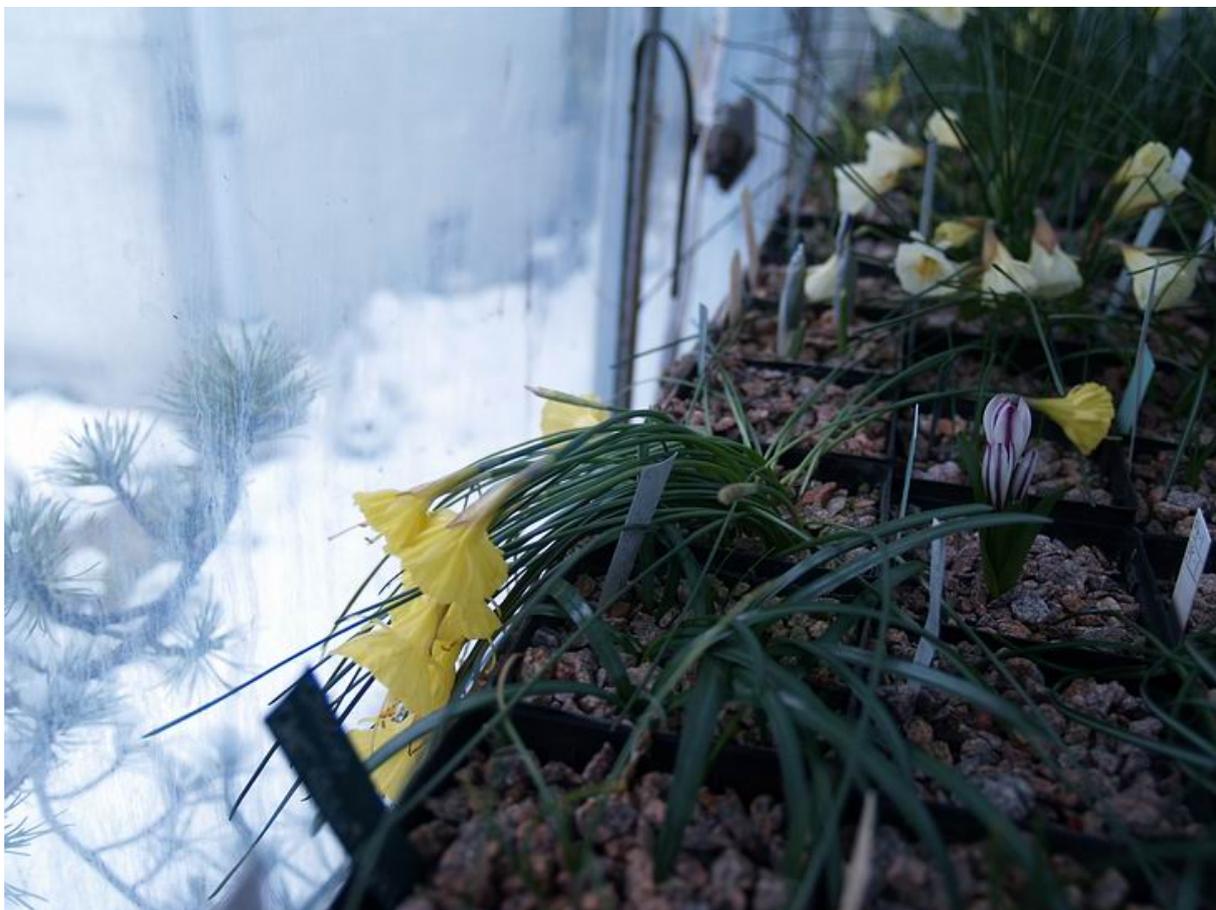
Hamamelis flowers

A bit of creative camera work employing the small built in flash and all is revealed –the stunning colour of the flowers emphasised by the cap of snow both of which are set on the underexposed deep blue of the sky.



Frozen Narcissus

What a difference a day makes - as I write this log we have had a cold night of -11C and the temperature at mid day is still -5C. Many of the Narcissus seen earlier in this bulb log holding their heads up to the sunshine are now completely flopped over as all the moisture in the pots is frozen up.



**Frozen Narcissus
'Atlas Gold'**

It is mostly the pots at the edge of the plunge where the frost can penetrate deeper that are the worst affected like this poor pot of frozen Narcissus 'Atlas Gold'

I have adjusted the thermostats to try and defrost them slowly and just have to hope that this cold snap will not last too long and that the bulbs will survive.

Frozen Narcissus 'Atlas Gold'