



***Eucomis bicolor* in the garden**



## **Eucomis bicolor**

A few weeks ago I showed some pictures of *Eucomis* with the flower spikes just emerging from the nest of leaves – by now some of them are in flower. The flowers open from the bottom of the spike upwards and by the time the top flowers are open the bottom ones will have gone over. While gardeners may prefer it if all the flowers were to open at the same time, giving the maximum visual display, opening in sequence is a good mechanism for a plant to employ as it gives a longer time period for fertilisation to occur.

If you look very carefully at the picture on the left you can just make out the tracery of a spiders web. – This spider is not daft because the flowers emit a foul smell resembling the scent of something that has died and so it attracts a mass of flies as you can see from the two pictures below. I watched a constant stream of flies pollinating the flowers having been attracted to the flowers by the fairly awful stink that I was not enjoying at all.

I especially liked the metallic blue/green coloured fly.





**Colchicum**

More Colchicum flowers appear on an almost daily basis or at least when we have a reasonable day with some warmth, unlike the gale force winds and driving rain we had for a day and a half which only served to flatten some of the Colchicum and the autumn flowering Crocus that were also in flower.



**Eucomis vandermerwei**

Eucomis vandermerwei, also featured a few weeks ago, is now starting to open its flowers.



**Fritillaria house**

Whenever I have a chance I continue to prepare the Fritillaria for their first soaking at the beginning of October.



**Air pot**

I have been thinking further about my recent observation that the bulbs towards the edge of the pots grow better and seem less likely to succumb to rots. My thoughts were that it is the increased drainage around the edges of the pots which also means more air pockets around the bulbs so to this end I have come up with the following method to

trial. I have placed a layer of compost in the pot, around 2cms in this case, on which I place the bulbs around the edge with a small clay pot in the centre.



**Air pot**

Now I cover the bulbs with compost filling the outside zone to just below the rim – then I fill the clay pot with 6mm gravel which I also use to top dress the pot in the normal way.



**Air pot**

Here is the completed pot ready for the first watering when I will soak the pot completely in my usual way along with the others. After that for all subsequent watering I will only water into the small gravel filled clay pot in the centre this will funnel the water down to the first layer of compost that I placed the bulbs on where the roots will be but should not allow the compost around and above the bulbs from getting too wet. When

I water in this way the water should drain quickly down but some moisture can and will pass through the clay pot to the compost around and above the bulbs but air will also be pulled in as the water drains down. Effectively I have constructed a doughnut shaped pot with edges in the centre as well as around the outside where the roots can receive plenty of moisture while the bulbs can stay that bit drier. Time will tell if this is an effective method to grow some of the bulbs that find our cool moist growing conditions more challenging. I am also interested to see how these pots with the bulbs planted only around the edges look when they are in flower and whether you will be able to tell them from the more conventionally planted pots



## Spider's lair

While working my way through the pots I find all sorts of fauna in the gaps and underneath. Ideally if I could design the pots they would have parallel not tapered sides so that there would be no gap between them when they are placed edge to edge on the plunge. Of course I do realise that could not work as square sides would prevent the pots being stacked inside each other when they are new and empty and be a logistical nightmare for storage and transport.



However not everything I find is a pest this spiders lair has lain unseen for a year and has built up quite a bit of debris including the remains of lots of insects and at least one sloughed spider skin .

If the picture above gives you the “creeps” then I suggest that you move quickly over the next page!

## The Spider



Among a number of unwelcome inhabitants that I found was this grouping of young recently hatched snails just below the top rim of a pot. Obviously I quickly dealt with them and a number of the adults that I also found attached to the pots despite the summer long dry conditions: one would wonder that they had not retreated to a cooler moister spot.



## Slugs

I also found a quite a number of slugs - mostly of two types - this big black keeled type and the slightly smaller but still large paler bodied one, making off with his long stalked beady eyes in the picture below. While I am no fan of using poisons in the garden I do revert to using some slug pellets in the seed frames and the bulb houses and I sprinkled some very sparingly onto the sand plunge before I replaced the pots.



I have said before that I would like to meet and “congratulate” the designer of this plastic pot (left) that includes a cosy slug nest in the bottom. I have two types of this size of pot the best one in my view has a flat bottom and less of a taper to the sides unfortunately the biggest majority of the ones I have are of the slug nest variety.





**Poppy in bed**

One other 'pest' I will have to deal with before the spring is Poppy the thirteen and a half year old Westie that we re-homed earlier in the year. While Lily for the most part is very good and keeps to the paths, Poppy has yet to learn this house rule that dogs are not allowed on the flower beds even if it is a nice warm sunny spot to lie in.



**Crocus vallicola**

When we do get warm sunny conditions the *Crocus vallicola* are quick to respond shooting up to flower. I am very fond of this delightful species not least because of the acuminate, long thread like, tips to the floral segments.

Luckily it is also one of the species that enjoys our cooler moist summers and it thrives both in these pots in an open frame and in the garden beds.



**Crocus vallicola**



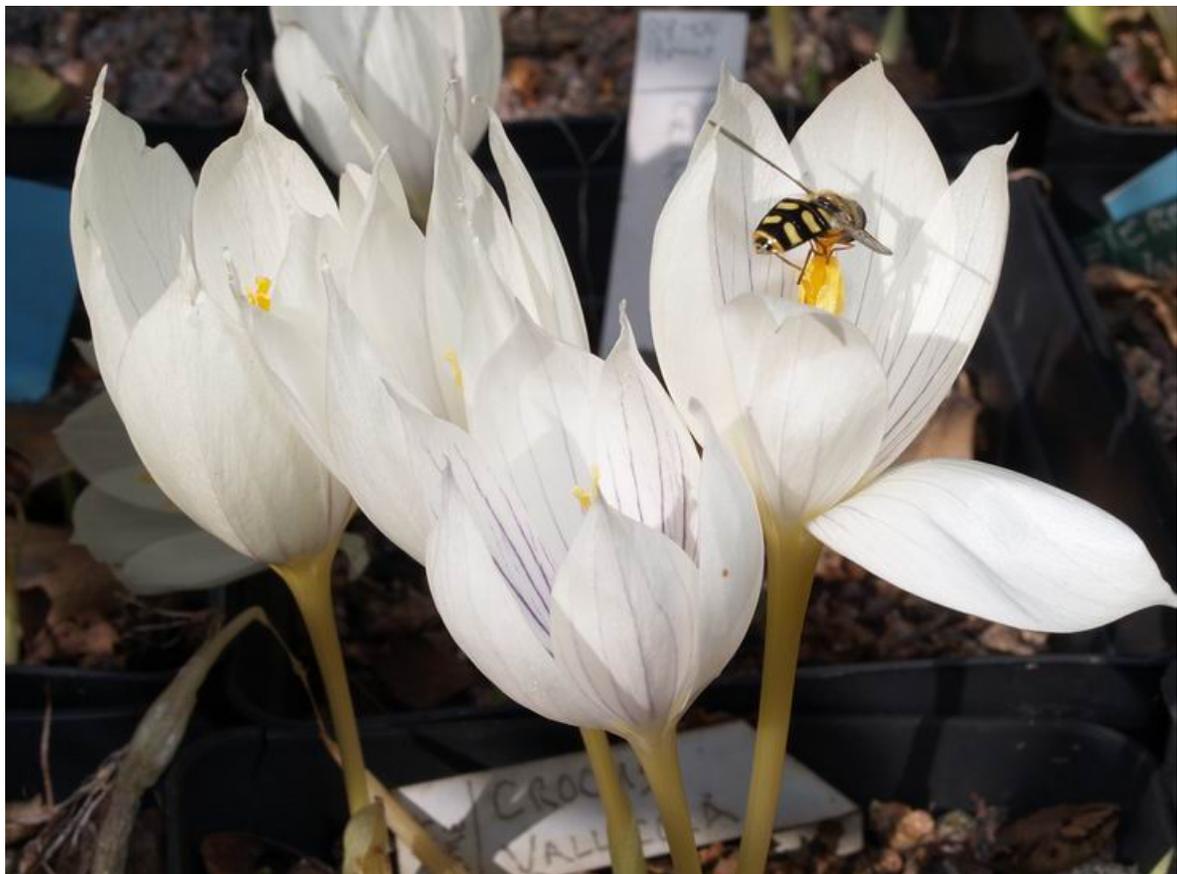
**Crocus vallicola**

When you look carefully you can find quite a variation in the markings – all have the typical ring of yellow dots but there are varying degrees of the violet lines some have none while others have strong lines running well up the petals.



**Crocus vallicola**

Another variation that I find in our garden population is the colour of the style. Most of our plants have a deep yellow stigma but some have a pale creamy yellow stigma like the one above. It is also worth noting the hairy throat that can be seen in this picture- this feature is used as a diagnostic device to help determine some species.



**Crocus vallicola**

It is hover flies that attend these flowers- a clear indication that they do not share the foul smell of the Eucomis with which I started this week's log.