



BULB LOG 32.....10th August 2011



Fritillaria davidii seedlings

Just over a month ago I was delighted to receive a small packet of seeds from Darren Sleep's *Fritillaria davidii* which had set seed – as far as I know this is the first time seed has been set in cultivation in the west. Regular readers will know that I would normally sow *Fritillaria* seeds in late August or September but the Chinese frits and

especially *F. davidii* have a different cycle so I chose to sow it immediately and place it in an open frame to take the weather. How excited I was to discover the tiny seed leaves emerging this week – the excitement is tinged anxiety about the challenge ahead of taking these tiny pants to maturity.



**Fritillaria pyrenaica
'Braeside'**

Following on from last week's bulb log this basket of *Fritillaria pyrenaica* 'Braeside' is in that frame with the *Erythroniums* I was repotting and so was also replanted.



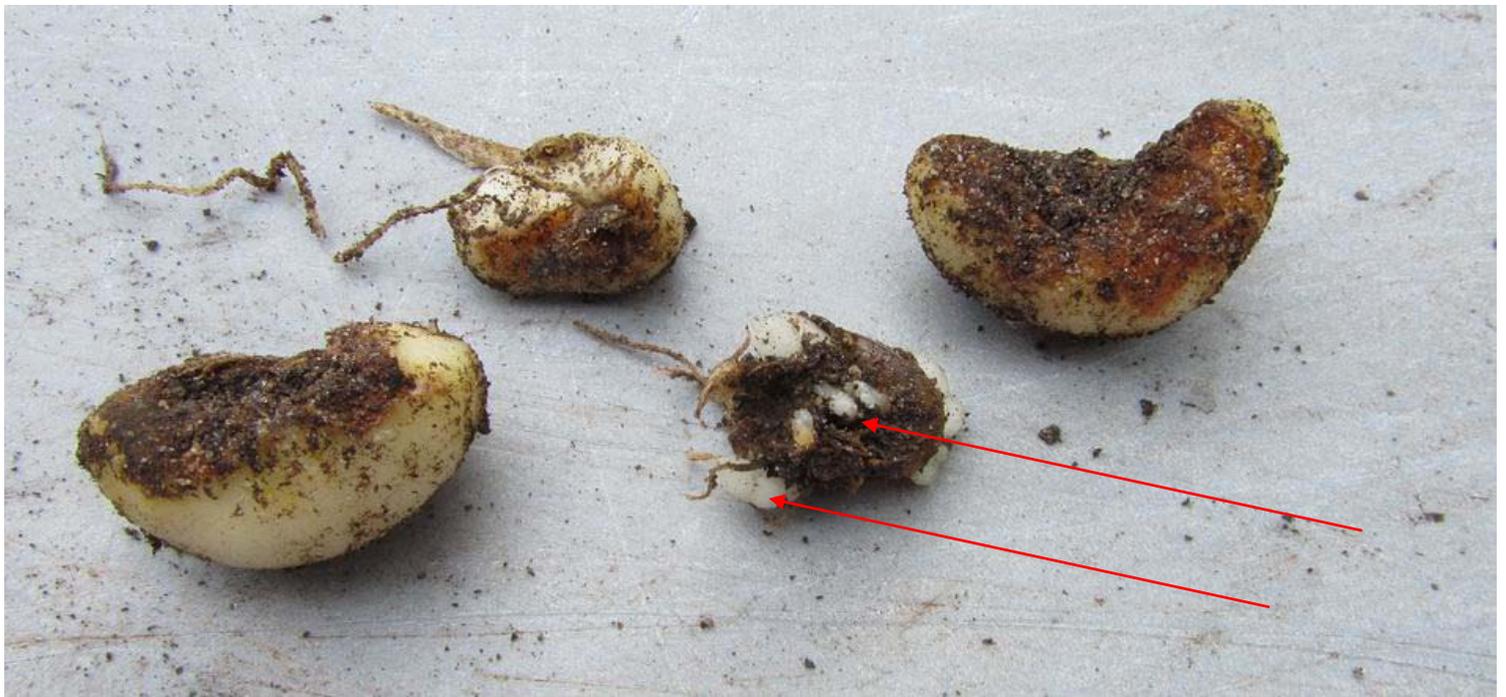
***Fritillaria pyrenaica* 'Braeside' bulbs**

A close up of the bulbs shows the reason I keep *Fritillaria pyrenaica* in an outside plunge is that it likes to root early and you can clearly see the plump white new roots growing out already. I find it difficult to keep this *Fritillaria* happy in pot culture under glass and when we used to grow bulbs for the Shows we would grow it in the garden or in a plunge basket and lift some in the dormant period of early summer to pot up for the following year's spring show.



Fritillaria pyrenaica is a great bulb in the garden and the sand plunge and it is best lifted and split up every three years or so, before the clump becomes too congested.

Just as with the *Erythroniums*, this *Fritillaria pyrenaica* shares its basket with some *Crocus nudiflorus*.



Fritillaria pyrenaica

No matter how well the general health of the clump of bulbs appears there will always be some that have suffered from rot. In the case above it is a wet rot caused by environmental factors and not an infectious form of rot. However do not dispose of the bits – clean them up by removing any active rot, dust it with sulphur powder and replant it. After a while a number of new buds will appear from the healthy tissue as can be seen in the small bulb in the centre foreground.



***Crocus vallicola* seedlings**

I am going through another phase of reducing of the number of bulbs we are growing in pots. I have to do this every so often as I tend to get carried away and grow so many in pots that it gets to the stage where I just cannot give them all the attention they need. One of the areas I am tackling is the seed frames where many pots have not been repotted since the seed was sown. If these seedlings of *Crocus vallicola* had been repotted after their second year they would be flowering size now – the fact that they have survived since 2005 without ever having been repotted is a testament to the bulbs and their ability to survive. I have rewarded their persistence by planting them directly into the garden now.



Trillium seedlings

A number of pots of Trilliums in the seed frames are also ready to be planted out into the garden and now, just as their new roots are emerging is an ideal time. I am really trying to deal with all the pots in the seed frames including



the ones that have lain for years without any germinations but I do check though each one carefully for any signs of life.

Just as well I did check the pots before discarding the contents as I discovered these newly germinating seeds of special form of **Trillium grandifloru**

m sown several years ago. Some seeds can lie dormant for several years before the conditions to break down their dormancy and germination occur. Also many Trilliums germinate underground first producing the root and bulb before sending up its first leaf after another dormant period which can be a year later. All the compost from the old seed pots is scattered on the garden bulb beds giving any ungerminated seed yet more time to germinate and it is surprising how often we discover some unexpected plant that appears this way in these beds.



Dactylorhiza

In bulb log 30 I showed a picture in a raised bed of this Dactylorhiza which was ready to be split up. I got round to the task this week and as you can see in the picture below this clump went on to produce seven new tubers plus I will replant the old stems which will form another set of tubers before they die back in the winter.





Dactylorhiza

Just as the last flowers fade is the ideal time to lift and split your Dactylorhiza especially with clumps that are becoming a bit congested.

Using a garden fork I carefully loosen the clump from the ground until I can lift it onto a tray.



When you see the clump on the tray you can see how congested and tangled it has become. This year was probably the optimum size for a clump - performing beautifully- but if I left it alone the competition would become too great and the plants would get smaller and eventually stop flowering.





I carefully tease the roots out by gently tugging stems in opposite directions in a slightly circular motion and at the same time gently shake the mass - sometimes you pull so far then swap your grip to another two stems until the tubers can be teased apart complete with their long fat roots.

Inevitably some damage will be done and roots will get snapped but this does not fatally damage the plants.

It is only when you get them up in your hands that you can appreciate the size that some of these have reached – it is like holding a well grown leek.

The next task is to identify the old tuber out of which the stem grows from the new tubers that will flower next year





Holding the base of the stem and old tuber gently twist the new growths until they break away. This plant above produced four new growths and now I will replant the old stem which will grow on to produce a number more tubers this year greatly increasing the rate of multiplication.



Dactylorhiza 'Eskimo Nell'



After dividing a clump I would normally leave it for a few years before disturbing it again but the beautiful and scarce white form *Dactylorhiza* 'Eskimo Nell' is not so generous in its offspring and if left alone it only produces a single new tuber to replace the old one. The picture on the left shows the new whiter tuber on the left and the old one attached to the stem on the right.

I split the clump above last year but have decided to do it again this year because not only do we want more in our garden but we have a long list of people waiting for any surplus we have to pass on. My decision was also influenced by the plant growing strongly in the cool damp weather we are getting.

***Dactylorhiza* 'Eskimo Nell' tubers**



Old tuber



New tuber

On the left is the old tuber from which the stem grows and on the right you can see the new tuber with next year's shoot lying against the base of the current stem.



A careful twist releases the new tuber which I plant back into the hole the clump came from along with some fresh garden compost. The old stem can be either planted elsewhere in the garden or into a pot to produce another tuber. These additional tubers will take a few years to reach flowering size – sometimes the old tuber produces more than one extra offset after the dominant one is removed. It is so often the case that the most desirable form of a plant is the slowest to increase.



Roscoeae scillifolia* and *Roscoeae alpina

Here is another example of plants that are often mistakenly named in our seed exchanges - you request *Roscoeae alpina* and get *Roscaeae scillifolia* pink form. Notice the seed pods.



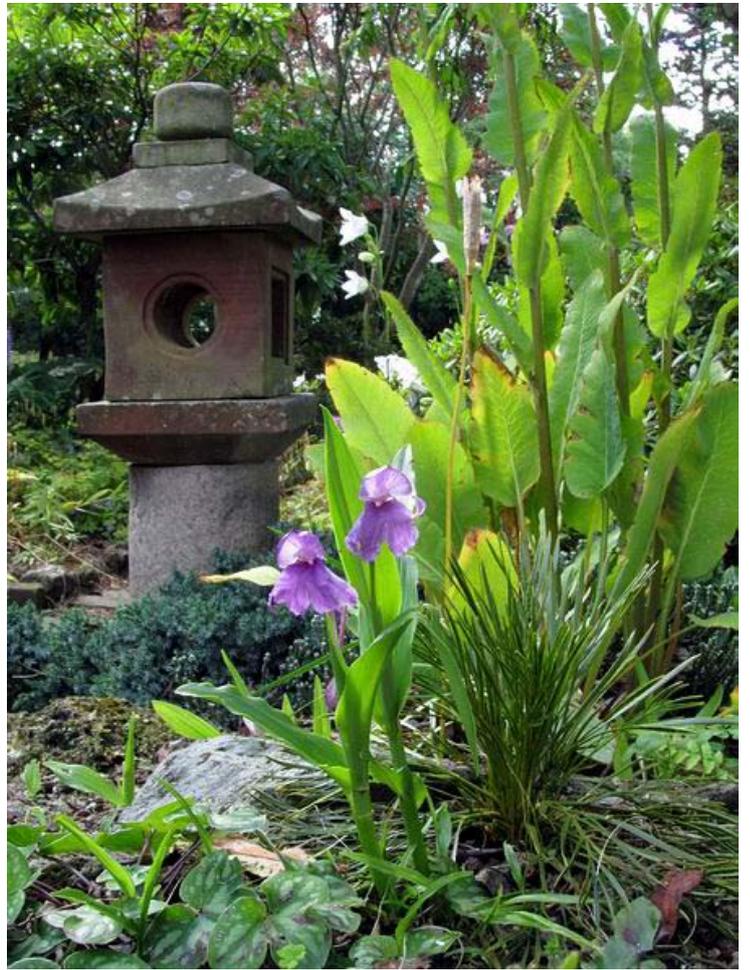
Roscoea scillifolia

They are just as easy separated when in seed – the seed pods of *Roscoea scillifolia* rise up on a stem.



Roscoea alpina

While the seed pods of *Roscoea alpina* stay down in the leaves.



Roscoea scillifolia* and *Roscoea alpina

They are both around the same height, 15cms, but the flowers are very different. *Roscoea scillifolia* has pale pink flowers with a narrow lower lip while *Roscoea alpina* has purple flowers with a broad lower lip.



Rhododendron auriculatum

There was more excitement in the garden this week when we discovered that our *Rhododendron auriculatum* had produced its first flowers after the best part of 30 years waiting – and because of the rain we nearly missed them as a number of trusses had already gone brown before we even noticed them tucked away in the far southern edge of our garden.