



BULB LOG 04.....26<sup>th</sup> January 2011



**Full Moon**

I am quite pleased with this picture of the full moon. It was a hand held shot using my newish Cannon SX210 IS compact at the full 14x optical zoom setting. It could have been sharper if I had used a tripod but I just took it when I was out for a walk and while I always have a camera with me I do not carry a tripod all the time.



**Winter leaves**



## Hellebore leaves

There is much advice on when it is best to remove the leaves on our Hellebores - if we are to remove them at all. My view is that it does not make much difference to the growth of the plants whether you take them off in the autumn, winter, spring or if you leave them on to die off naturally as the new leaves come into growth. So it comes down to the gardener's attitude. A tidy grower will probably cut everything back in the autumn while I like a bit of growth through the winter even though it may be considered untidy by some. I am very grateful for the many plants that hold onto their leaves providing some interest and

greenery all through the winter.

Hepatica is another subject that has winter green leaves that left to their own devices in the garden do not die back until after the new growth has begun.

## Hepatica leaves

Even after the ravages of the winter I still enjoy the greenery these plants provide in the bulb beds while the bulbs are still slumbering under the ground. I am sure that the leaves also prove a valuable resource to many forms of wild life that do not hibernate all through the winter months. While we may prefer to rid our gardens of some of these garden inhabitants such as slugs and snails they form a valuable part of the biodiversity of our garden.



Ferns are another of these great plants that come into their own in the bare winter beds.



**Hellebore buds**

The time I choose to cut the leaves of these winter green plants is when I am going to spread my mulch. Due to the prolonged snow cover in December I did not manage to lift the tree leaves from the autumn fall so I am taking advantage of any fine days to catch up and I decided it was as good a time as any to get the composted mulches spread at the same time. This is when I cut back the leaves on the Hellebores, Hepaticas and ferns.



**Cyclamen leaves**

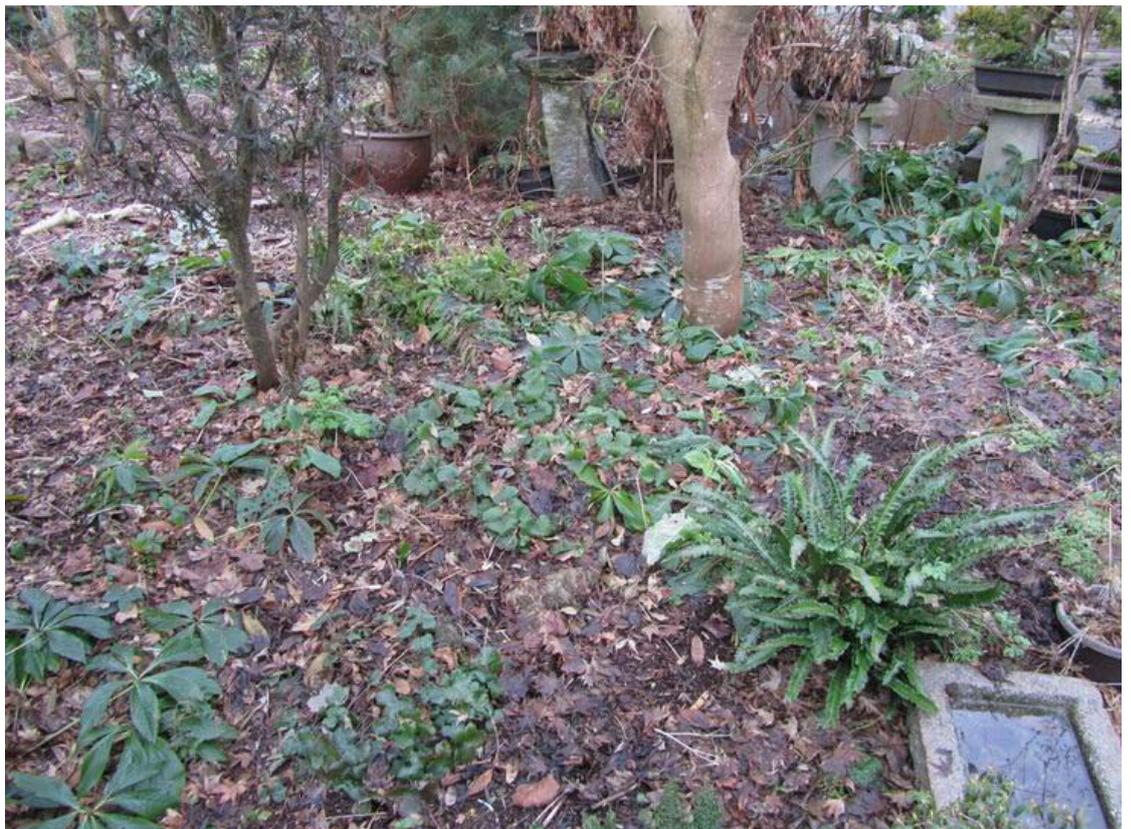
Towards the centre of the above picture you can see the leaves of *Cyclamen hederifolium* - of course I do not remove those at this time as that would weaken the corms- they are left to die back naturally which will happen sometime during the summer. A quick look around at some of the *Cyclamen hederifolium* leaves reminds us just how much interest they can bring to the garden at this time of the year: despite the ravages of the weather and the wildlife they are still decorative .



### **Bed before work**

This is a picture taken before I had cut back the leaves or lifted the autumn harvest of fallen tree leaves.

Now I am taking advantage of any fine weather to get these beds cleaned back by removing the old growth, lifting the autumn leaf fall and removing any weeds all at the same time.





**Bed during work**

This is the mid stage with the growth and leaves removed and it is amazing how many shoots which have been slowly growing under the mat of soggy leaves have been revealed.



**Mass of shoots**

I take great care not to stand on the beds any more than is necessary as I do not want to either damage these shoots or indeed compact the ground if I can avoid it.



**Mulch spread**

Some of you might be wondering why I lift all the leaves only to replace them with a carpet of mulch. Well firstly the leaves will compost into a lovely leaf mould which is a valuable component for our potting mixes and secondly the wet leaves can form a blanket that excludes light inhibiting some seeds from germinating and proving too difficult a layer for some delicate seed leaves that have germinated from penetrating. The mulch layer is composted prunings etc and while it forms a good layer to hold in some moisture it does not prevent seeds from germinating.



**Snow drops**

I have carefully placed the mulch around this early clump of snowdrops so they were not damaged.



**Fritillaria gibbosa seedlings**

Another daily routine is to check the seed pots, especially those in the outside frames. It is amazing how quickly these emerging shoots can be damaged when we get bad weather and of course they are a perfect snack for any passing slug or snail. I managed to find space in the Fritillaria house for this precious pot of Fritillaria gibbosa seedlings.



**Narcissus 'Minicycla'**

A few fine days is all that it takes to stimulate a rush of growth in the bulb house as the tiny tips of green waiting to spring into activity in this pot indicate. To fuel their growth the bulbs need water and I have also used this period of

positive temperatures to turn on our outside water supply and give the bulbs a thorough soaking.



**Soaking the pots**

After the long cold period many of the bulbs are getting quite dry and the only way to ensure that they have an adequate supply of moisture to fuel their growth is to flood the pots.



**After soaking**

As the flooded pot drains away in front of my eyes it allows the compost and gravel that has been thrust up by the growth of the shoots to settle back revealing more of the growth. Instead of tiny tips of green peeking through the

gravel I can now see the leaves and flower buds clearly.



**Narcissus asturiensis**

These flower buds that promise an imminent floral display are a wonderful sight that cheers me in the winter months. The doubling up of the growth from many of these bulbs is obvious from the adjacent flower buds indicating I should find extra bulbs in this pot.



**Watering nozzle**

My home made watering nozzle is designed so that I can water each pot in turn without soaking the foliage. I prefer to water in the morning so that any excess moisture has plenty time to dry away and for the leaves to dry out from any splashes before darkness falls.

This is an important measure in minimizing the risk of spreading any water-borne fungal and rot problems that can attack the foliage.

While I am watering the pots individually I can also check for any signs of growth. Because it has been a long time since many of the pots were watered I have soaked all the pots even the ones where no signs of growth is visible. From now on I will only water the pots when they show new leaf growth.



### **Crocus danfordiae**

My final picture for this week shows that the milder temperatures have encouraged the flowers on the Crocus danfordiae that I showed last week to open and reveal their diminutive charm.