



BULB LOG 25..... 20th June 2012



All the larger blue meconopsis in our garden are self seeded – who can resist them? Sometimes they appear in the wrong place and can obstruct a path way - then we will lift them at two years old and move them to a more appropriate spot. The one above has thirteen flower buds.



As a rule I do not like the purple colours and weed them out or at least dead head them to ensure that they do not set seed but this one has a cleaner colour than most. I am happy to let it stay if for no other reason than the colour works well with the companion plants that now decorate the bulb bed below.





Aphids on lily buds

The outbreak of aphids and many other pests always coincides with the hatching of the young birds or to be more accurate perhaps it is the hatching of young birds that is timed to take advantage of nature's protein larder.

I am a very reluctant user of insecticides and only revert to them to protect certain particularly vulnerable plants and the lilies fall into this category.

The picture on the left was taken a day after spraying at night with a combined contact and systemic insecticide. As you can see the aphids are dead but the damage their sap sucking has caused, namely the distortion of the bud and foliage, remains.

My main concern regarding aphids and the lily family is they cause the spread of virus. While I can live with some distortion of the foliage I have to do everything I can to prevent the spread of virus and so I carefully sprayed every Lily, *Nomocharis*, etc in the garden.



I never give a specific name to any of the **Nomocharis** we raise from our own seed as due to their promiscuity they are all garden hybrids. None the less they are beautiful as the flower above demonstrates and just look at the number of buds clustered at the top of the stem in the picture below.



Nomocharis



Lilium mackliniae 'Nagaland form'

The reason I am showing this recently introduced form of *Lilium mackliniae* is to highlight another form of pest damage. Look at the larger stem on the left and you will notice that instead of rising vertically alongside the smaller one, it runs almost horizontal then turns 90degrees. When it first emerged I was horrified to see that a slug or snail had chewed through the stem and it was only attached by a very slim bridge of outer skin. Rather than panicking and removing the remains I left it and obviously there is enough of a connection left for the plant to continue to grow. I doubt if I will get great flowers or seed set on this stem but more importantly in this case the bulb will be able to feed from the leaves and not be lost or diminished by the attack - I will keep you posted.



This group of plants have all self seeded in the gap between the paving slab and the foundation bricks that the glasshouse sits on. The *Trillium* seedlings are as a result of me knocking over a pot of freshly sown seed some years ago, all the rest have arrived by themselves.



I have had good intentions to rescue these plants for a few years but always put it off but this year I decided it was time. I lifted the slab only to find that it was sitting on another slab – so I lifted it as well so I could extract the plants with minimal damage.



Plants lifted.



Trillium seedlings

If you follow conventional advice, that is so often repeated in books and magazines, they pronounce the best time to lift and divide Trilliums is in Autumn just as the leaves have died back or in spring just as the growth bud starts to extend these musings often go on to explain that the plants may sulk for a year or two after the disturbance. All this advice is wrong - the best time to lift, split, or move Trilliums is just as the flowers are fading and the reason for this becomes obvious when you study the growth cycle of the creeping rhizome.



Trillium rhizomes

As the flowers fade the rhizome, and underground stem, is growing and new roots are forming that are essential for the plant to make growth next year. By moving the plants carefully now you can avoid damaging these new roots. If you wait until autumn or next spring the new roots will have extended out into the ground and it is inevitable that you will damage them and hence the plant sulks. I move, split, prick out all my Trilliums in the green just after peak flowering time without any check on the plants growth. As long as you plant them back immediately and water them in well they grow on and if they

are flowering sized will flower the following year. Now if you do move them at other times and damage the new roots the plants will survive underground but may lack the energy the new roots would have provided to send up any leaf growth however the rhizome will continue to grow as normal sending out new roots the following year so you should not lose the plants but they will sulk - my advice is to move them in the green.



Dicentra cucularia bulbs

When I give talks on our garden and show how intensively it is planted one of the most commonly asked questions is how do we plant anything new? The simple answer is - carefully.

We have been applying humus rich mulches for so many years that the top levels of soil are very soft and we can easily scrape back the surface or probe carefully with a finger without having to resort to a trowel or fork. With a tray full of Trillium to plant I had to do just that - the first scrape revealed some *Dicentra cucularia* bulbs which sit just below the surface that is where they choose to grow and if you plant them too deep they will not flower again until they have worked themselves back to almost the surface.



Another scrape revealed some **Arisaema seed germinating**. The method we use mostly is to plant by scattering seeds or planting out small seedlings so we rarely ever have to dig a big hole.



Arisaema forrest

Many Arisaema will spread by self seeding and some also form stolons and increase vegetatively making dense forests of stems.



The first of the Dactylorhiza are also coming into flower – these in one of the raised beds.



Seedling Dactylorhiza

This is the seedling Dactylorhiza that seeded into a trough of Saxifraga - I showed it a few weeks ago and now it has opened its first flowers.



Dactylorhiza seedlings

We really do find Dactylorhizas seeding all around the garden where the conditions are suitable. Undisturbed ground seems to be the most important criteria hence we find most in troughs, old seed pots, and the edges of paths. These seedlings show that they have very little in the way of roots relying almost entirely on the tiny tubers.



Almost all the **Dactylorhiza** in our garden now have been raised from these self sown seedlings. The original plants we acquired many years ago as tubers have long since died but their genes remain in these healthy seedlings.



A group of self seeded **Meconopsis** at the edge of a path are in full bloom. Allowing plants to self seed is one of the most natural and pleasurable ways of gardening.



I will end this week with two views taken from the same spot first looking one way then the other.
Much of the current colour in these pictures is provided by self sown plants.

