



BULB LOG 37..... 12<sup>th</sup> September 2012



**Bulb bed**



One of the advantages bulbs have over many plants is having a big store of food enabling them to spring into growth very quickly. That is exactly what I am seeing now. In the three days that I have been away these Colchicums, of which there were no signs before I left, are now in full flower. At last whatever trigger they have been awaiting has been sprung and now they are up waiting for the sun to fully open their flowers. The large one seen on the left certainly deserves its name Colchicum 'The Giant' as it has the biggest, tallest flowers of any that we grow.



### **Colchicum tessellated hybrid**

We have grown this lovely tessellated Colchicum hybrid for many years and it is as reliable as clockwork always increasing well and provided we split the clumps every three to five years it flowers freely. Most bulbs that clump up in the garden will start to produce more leaves than flowers after a number of years;

feeding them with potassium rich fertiliser in spring will help them flower for longer but lifting and splitting is still essential to maintain free flowering over the long term. How I wish that people would not refer to these as 'autumn crocus' this is a total misnomer that is perpetuated by many garden writers and broadcasters who should know better. They are autumn flowering colchicums and not even in the same family as autumn flowering Crocus, Liliaceae as opposed to Iridaceae. I think it is misleading to the general public to continue calling them 'autumn crocus'.



**Colchicum montanum**



## **Colchicum montanum**

Formally known to us as Merendera montana I am now trying this wee Colchicum outside in one of the bulb sand beds.

I only planted out some of the small offsets so it will be a few years before I find out if it will take to life outside in our weather.



## **Tropaeolum speciosum**

We have to be careful where Tropaeolum speciosum grows in our garden or more specifically, what it climbs up. On a large conifer it is fine and very attractive providing late summer flowers that will continue to appear until the frosts become more regular and winter takes hold.



### **Tropaeolum seeds**

*Tropaeolum speciosum* spreads around our garden all too freely both by underground roots as well as by seeds. When we find it growing through any of the smaller ericaceous plants we remove it as it can kill them within as little as two weeks by excluding the light.



### **Autumn colours**

These lovely autumn fruits also need watching. It is nice to enjoy the colours for a while but it is best to remove them before the seeds are shed. Both the *Actaea spicata rubra* and *Hypericum* can take over if allowed and it is much easier to remove the berries than to have to weed out the hundreds of seedlings they would produce.

Yes, I missed the *Epilobium*.



### **Actaea pachypoda**

On the other hand I would be happy to have a few more plants of *Actaea pachypoda*. Known as the 'Dolls Eye' plant for obvious reasons, it seems to be a much less vigorous plant in our garden.



Other signs of autumn are the sudden collapse of *Arisaema wilsonii* as it has decided it is time to retreat back under ground. This single plant that we bought as a bulb increases well enough underground allowing us to split it up every few years but we have never had seed set on it perhaps it would prefer a mate.



I think my favourite of the Arisaemas is *A. nepenthoides* and it does set seed – I think it is the fantastic stems that do it for me.



The fat red fruits of *Podophyllum hexandrum (emodii)* are also such a wonderful feature of autumn.



### **Cyclamen hederifolium**

Cyclamen hederifolium in all colours are now springing in to flower all over the garden some two to three weeks later than they have appeared in previous years. You will notice I have avoided saying 'later than normal' because having been growing and studying the plants in our garden for forty years, I still do not know what 'normal' is.





**A *Cyclamen hederifolium* seedling in the gravel path.**



A New Zealand **Gaultheria hybrid** is covered in fruits. These look superficially like berries but closer inspection will show that the white fleshy calyx has swollen but not fused into a berry so the seed capsule is clearly visible in the open ends. In the background the beautiful

glaucous blue foliage of *Rhododendron impeditum* shows the range of this beautiful genus from these tiny leaved forms to large shrubs and even trees.



**Rhododendron auriculatum**

A bit spotted with the rain, the beautifully scented flowers of *Rhododendron auriculatum* peek out from the top of our garden. Having waited over twenty-five years for the first flowers now we are graced with two flowering trusses in this its second year of flowering.





Earlier I was on my soap box about ‘autumn crocus’ and another of the things that really annoys me is when people describe Rhododendrons to be boring, as one of my broadcasting colleagues did just a few weeks ago; ‘with a quick flush of flowers and nothing for the rest of the year’. These statements show a great ignorance of this wonderful genus and the decorative values they bring to the garden for twelve months of the year. Who could not be attracted to the wonderful foliage of **Rhododendron bureavii**, above. We use Rhododendrons along with the trees as the

structure of our garden giving it shape and form all year around.



Many of them are highly decorative even if they never produced a flower but most do flower freely, some twice a year. To ensure best flowering you should

dead-head as the flowers fade to prevent the plant from forming seed. While this is practical if you just have a few smaller plants we now have so many rhododendrons that we cannot get around to dead-head them all. The more mature plants will get into a cycle where even when they produce seed some of the shoots will still flower the following year. **Rhododendron decorum** above displays both fat flowering buds for next spring and seed pods.



I will add a few more examples to show the variation and beauty of Rhododendron foliage such as the narrow leaves seen above on **Rhododendron makinoi** – they are covered in white fur-like indumentum. Below is a hybrid between **Rhododendron recurvoides** and **R. yakushimanum** again displaying outstanding foliage.





The fat furry buds protect next spring's flowers as the indumentum on the upper surface of the leaves of *Rhododendron yakushimanum* slowly gets washed away the lower leaf surface remains intensely furry. Who except those that do not know these plants could call them boring?



I should have mentioned last week that another benefit of *Opiopogon nigrescens* is that it will grow even in dense shade as this picture shows it is choosing to explore the darkness under Rhododendrons and tree Paeonias.



I will finish off this week with two more good value plants that flower over a long period - the pink climbing daisy, a hybrid of **Mutisia oligodon** can have flowers almost every month of the year and though it does not start until mid to late summer



**Cyananthus lobatus** continues to flower until the hardest frosts eventually send it underground.