



BULB LOG 37.....11th September 2013



Work on the front garden progresses slowly and now people can see into our 40 year old dwarf conifer *Chamaecyparis obtusa nana gracilis*. Many gardeners complain when the plant they got as a so called 'dwarf conifer' grows too big but what you must bear in mind is that the dwarf is in relation to the size of the type of tree not the size of your rock garden. *Chamaecyparis obtusa* is a forest tree from central Japan where it can grow to 35m tall with a trunk up to 1m in diameter so our tree at some at some 4 m is a relative dwarf.



The plan was to thin out what had become an overgrown area for under planting with bulbs of all kinds. To achieve this we removed a number of shrubs but a few we just cut back to the ground hoping that they might re-grow.



You can never be completely sure if shrubs will bud from low down when you cut them back so drastically, especially evergreens. We raised this *Ledum* from seed collected in Japan and after many years in the overgrown shrubbery it had grown straggly and did not look attractive when exposed so we decided the only option was to be brutal with the pruning. In this case we have been rewarded with lots of new growth so we will be able to enjoy this shrub for many more years as it slowly grows again.



Planting the newly exposed ground in the front garden has involved many a pot of bulbs from the seed frames and while planting trilliums I was reminded of their root growth. This is **Trillium ovatum maculatum** and you can see that the fat new roots that support the plants growth next year are already established so I took great care not to damage them. This is why I recommend that if you are lifting and dividing Trilliums the best time to do it is immediately after flowering before these new roots emerge. When you replant them the new roots can then grow into the fresh ground allowing the plant to flower happily the following year. If you lift Trilliums in autumn or spring, as is often stated, you are likely to damage these roots meaning the plant will be unable to grow well until next spring and it will most probably be the following year before they will flower.



While we have enjoyed a warm summer for a change many of the plants we grow have been suffering. Meconopsis which normally form great perennial clumps for us have been scorched and been reluctant to grow in this year's hot dry soil.



Thankfully recent heavy rains followed by more warm weather have resulted in a sudden surge of late growth and the Meconopsis are now looking much happier.



This time of the season also sees the troughs and raised beds looking most lush. 'Alpine' plants tend to come into growth and flower early in the year then they take a break as they see out the hot drier summer months then a second flush of growth as they respond to the autumn rains.



This a good time of year to plant or replant troughs as any plants you add will have some time to establish before the onset of winter. When I have run trough workshops and ask people to fill their trough ready for landscaping invariably they will fill it to just below the rim as above left - this will generally lead to a relatively flat design. I advise you pile as much of the compost mix up as you can - shown above right – this will encourage you to be bold with your rock work.



Have a mixture of sizes of rock available - enough to completely cover the trough surface. It is best if all the rock is of the same type but having said that it is not essential as different rock types have to meet somewhere in nature and often do so with stunning effects. Here I am using my current favourite and readily available 'rock' type – broken concrete block. First add any big bits you have taking full advantage of the height – you may have to add or remove compost to bed the rocks in and make them secure.



The completed trough with a few saxifrage cuttings added.



Troughs and raised beds looking lush



This trough with **Saxifraga brunonis** in flower is landscaped with natural limestone and the saxifrages are growing very happily, rooting into the moss that grows on the rock - compare that to the one below which is landscaped with broken concrete block where the plants are also rooting into the rock.



I am having to control the amount of moss that covers the rock surface.



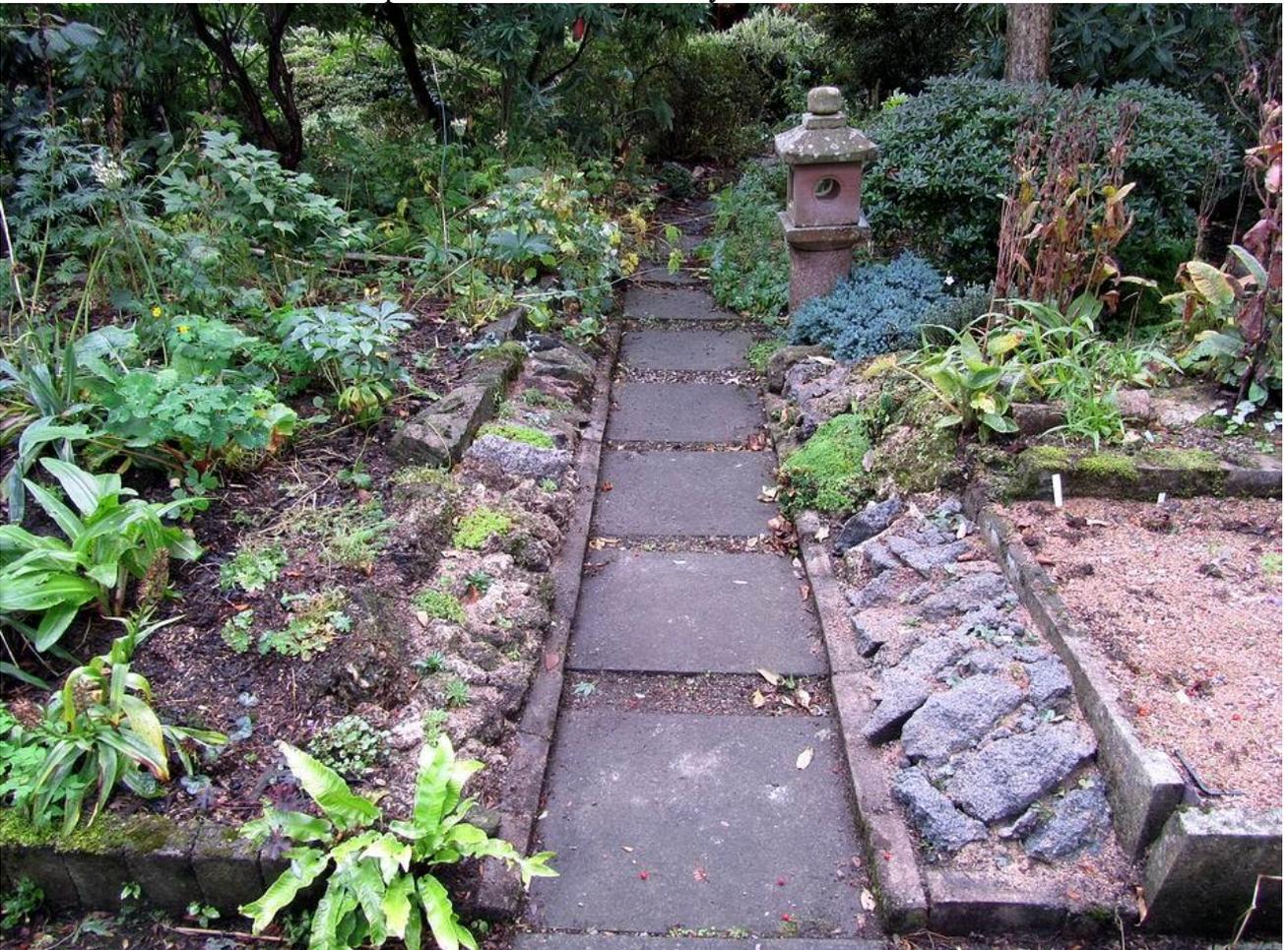
Looking from the trough and raised bed area towards the garden but before we go there I want to show a couple of flowering plants.



Dianthus alpinus is enjoying its second flush of growth including a few flowers.



Cyananthus microphyllus is a late summer/early autumn flowering plant in our garden blooming some time later than *Cyananthus lobatus*, which can open its first flowers in July.



As you move towards the garden you pass between a sand plunge for the *Erythroniums* and a rock garden on the right and a bulb bed on the left – I have just reworked the narrow strips that run alongside the paths.



These areas had become a bit overgrown with tall plants and shrubs as happens in gardens and I decided it was time for a makeover. Using a mixture of rock types including tufa, granite and broken concrete I have applied the same styling as I use in my troughs to create a series of habitats for small plants



Colchicums flowers are popping up everywhere now and are most attractive when the low sun provides some backlight.



Even in flat light it is so nice to see so many bulbs coming into flower.



I cannot remember seeing quite so many hoverflies of all types around as there are this year and when the sun shines they too are attracted to the flowering bulbs.....