



BULB LOG 18.....30th April 2014



Front Garden



Sand seed bed

It is very easy, especially at this time of year, just to keep showing you all the beautiful plants that are in full flower and not tell you what is going on behind the scenes so this week there are no Erythroniums. Late last year we removed a lot of overgrown shrubs opening up one half of the front garden where we have been under planting with bulbs in a similar style to the back garden. It has taken us many years to establish this look in the back garden and you might think that that style does take years to get that look – I initially did. On analysing the situation and working on planting the front garden I realised that what takes all those years is producing enough suitable bulbs and compatible plants in the first place so the front garden planting is starting to look quite established already.

The only way to get the quantities of plants is to raise them from seed – even if you had very deep pockets (lots of money) you simply could not buy some of the plants we use. Our seed area down the west side of the house is also undergoing a change from five small seed frames where we sat the seed pots to a few large deeper, 30cms, sand beds where I am doing away with the pots and mostly sowing the seeds directly into the sand. In a few cases I have sown the seed into mesh sided pond baskets to contain the seedlings otherwise I am just scattering the seeds in sections without physical boundaries. It may be that bulbs get mixed up a bit, until they flower when I can identify them, but as I mostly want them for the garden keeping different taxa completely separated is not too important to me. Part of my reason for this experimental bed is that we know that plants that self-seed into our plunges invariably grow better than the ones in pots do – I will find out if this method works and is practical over the next five years or so. Above a group of seedlings are just germinating and eagle eyed readers may also notice that a *Fritillaria* has already mixed itself in



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***Eranthis pinnatifida* seed**

I have just collected the first seeds of the year from *Eranthis pinnatifida* and it shows how you do not need to wait until the seed capsule dries and opens to collect viable seed from a plant.



Eranthis pinnatifida seed

Many seeds are ready to part company and be independent from the parent while they are still green, or white in this case. The colour starts to change when the parent stops supplying nutrients and so the seed prepares itself for the distribution stage by starting to dry forming a protective 'coat'. The white seeds above were from the greener of the capsules shown above; they have not dried to form the dark skin and as a result they are also larger. As to whether you should store the seed or sow it immediately will depend on the subject but the plants and seeds themselves give us many clues as to how best to proceed. What do these seeds look like? Do they remind you of a miniature tuber? They certainly look like that to me so I take this as an indication that they are best sown immediately and should not be allowed to become fully dried out. One thing you should not do with bulb seeds is to place them in a refrigerator immediately on collection. The seed continues to develop for some time, at least 6 to 8 weeks after they become independent of the parent and for that process to work it needs a reasonably warm temperature - cooling them in a fridge will arrest this continued development and severely affect viability. I have sown the Eranthis seed and placed it in an open frame where it will not dry out completely. As I did not have

a bulk mix of seed compost ready I mixed a small quantity to my current formula.

Leafmould

The first ingredient, leafmould, may not be necessary but I think for growing in pots it brings some of the natural fungi and microbiological organisms that make soils work. Towards the middle of this picture you can see the white thread like structures of fungi that facilitate the breakdown of the leaf into a soil. The sand seed bed above has no leafmould but it is placed in contact with the soil allowing these organisms to migrate and become available should the plants need them.





The mix is roughly equal parts by volume of sharp sand, leafmould and 6mm grit plus a small amount of bone meal.

As you can see from the dark colour the ingredients are all moist making a very nice moist *but not wet* mix into which to sow the seeds.

Eranthis seed sown

The next decision to be made is do I sow the seed on the surface or at depth as I recommend for certain types of bulb seed?

There is a simple rule – all seed will germinate if sown on the surface but not all seed will germinate if sown deeply - probably due to the absence of light. So if you are unsure, sow on the surface. The indicator for those that grow on best if sown deep is the presence of an elaiosome to attract ants and includes Narcissus,



Galanthus and Crocus. Eranthis seeds do not have an elaiosome and I have not conducted any trials to study exactly how seeds of this genus germinate so I sow them on the surface with just a layer of grit to protect the seeds – this has proved successful in previous years as these seeds prove, coming from the first flowering of a 2011 sowing.



And so back to the front garden: what looks like an established planting was only created last autumn using seed pots in the old seed frame,s many that were so long overdue to be planted out that they in turn had flowered and scattered their seeds around. It gives a very pleasing and interesting mix of plants which I will add to gradually to extend the seasonal interest for as long as possible.



To the left of the above picture you will see a yellow Fritillaria – here it is in close up and below I show a picture of the interior.

Many of the labels in the old seed frames had been lost including this pot of Fritillaria which I have not yet managed to identify.

If you have any thoughts to what it might be I would be very pleased to hear them.



Unknown yellow *Fritillaria* showing style and nectaries.



I do not think it is *Fritillaria tubiformis* nor its sub species *moggridgii* shown here



I have felt rather guilty that I have taken so many pictures of *Fritillaria* recently but not shown them in favour of my favourite genus *Erythronium* so here is a token picture of some Frits growing in a sand bed.



The peak flowering in the Bulb house is well over with just some of the later flowering *Narcissus*, *Ornithogalum*, *Tropaeolum*, etc blooming. At this stage watering has to be done carefully as some plants still require plenty water and others need to dry out.



Plants like *Tecophilaea* above that still have fresh looking leaves and will be forming next year's corm need to be watered.



Others such as these *Narcissus* obviously should be allowed to dry out.



Bulbs that are setting seed need to be kept moist but not overly soaked. The myth that allowing bulbs to set seed will weaken them is a piece of gardening nonsense as they will grow on for around 4 to 6 weeks longer than those that have no seed, more than making up for the energy passed to the seed.



Back to a few of the many pretty flowers in the garden where Trilliums are really getting to their peak.



This sequence of four pictures plots the changing colour of *Trillium ovatum* flowers starting with the pure white as it first emerges then the various shades of pink as the flower ages and the anthocyanin's develop. (Note the notches chomped by the visiting Black Pheasant on the first photo)



Trillium grandiflorum

Most white *Trillium*s exhibit this colour change during the life of a flower but some of the most sought after are the pink forms that start out with good pink colours. This is one of our many seedlings between *Trillium grandiflorum* and its roseum form which display varying degrees of pinkness.



Trillium grandiflorum Gothenburg Pink strain

Last year I was given a few seedlings of *Trillium grandiflorum* Gothenburg Pink strain and it is such a good pink from the very moment the flower appears – as a strain this feature is passed down the seed generations.



Trillium grandiflorum Gothenburg Pink strain



A garden seedling which shows signs of having parentage involving *Trillium kuraybashii* and *T. chloropetalum* also has a lovely pink colour.

There has been an interesting discussion regarding the problems of classifying Trilliums, which can prove problematic even with the latest scientific methods, on the [Forum](#).



Finally for this week I return to the other half of our front garden which we intend to open up a bit creating more space for under-planting with bulbs.....