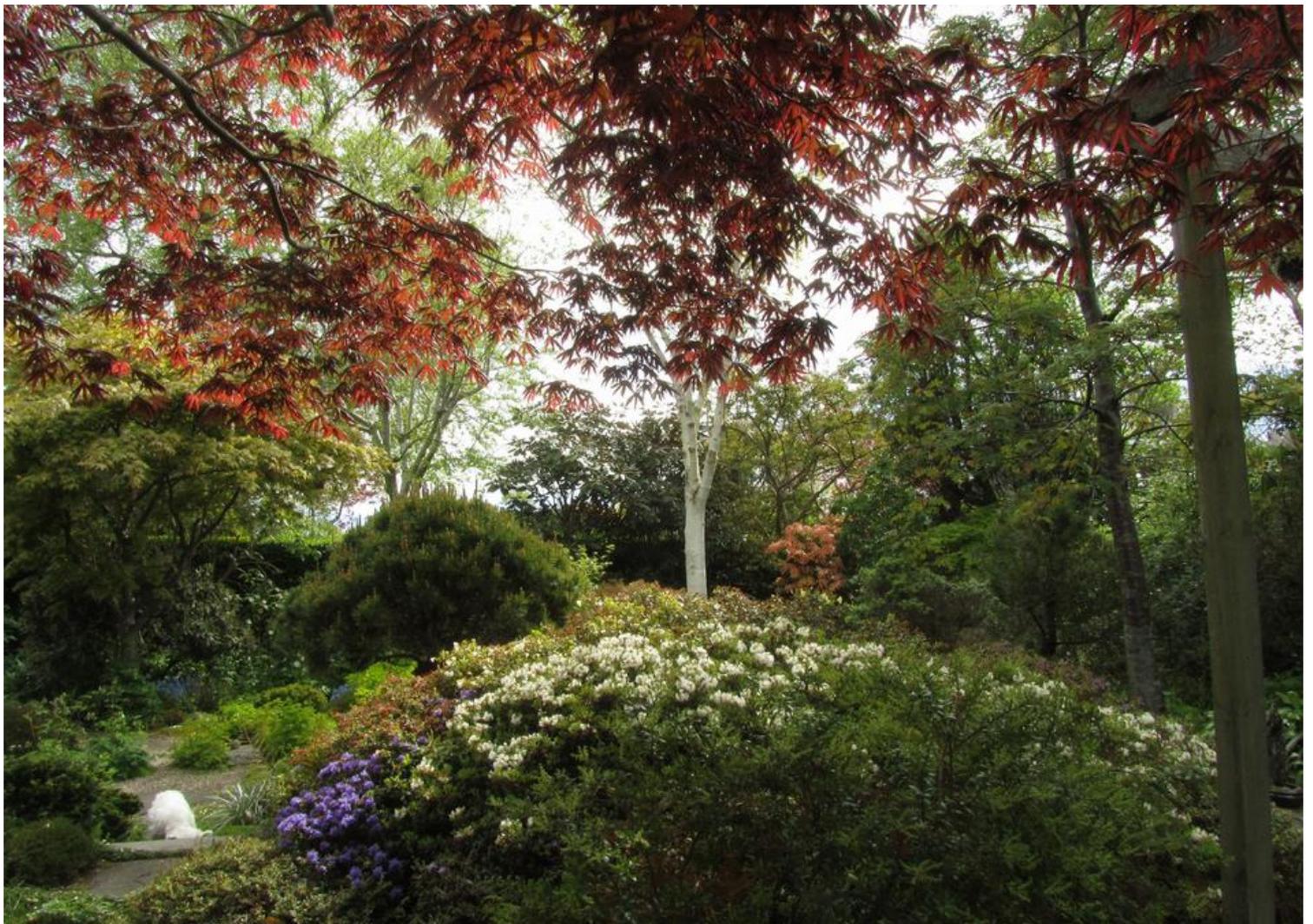




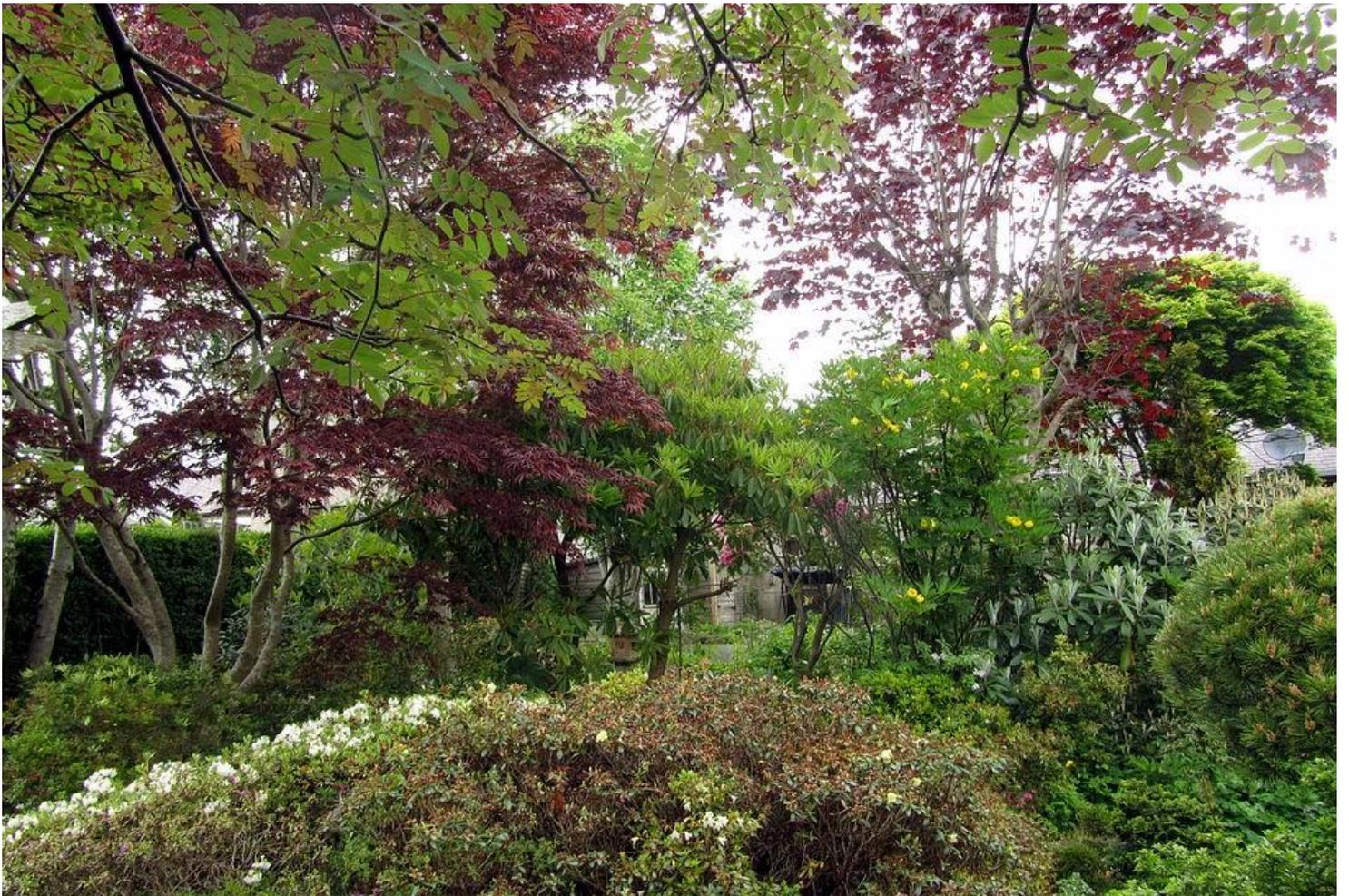


The cool weather continues to hold our plants back - temperatures are 2 degrees below the seasonal average, flowers are slow in opening, leaving a gap in our season. However this gives me time to contemplate and following on from last week's Bulb Log, showing how we like to carpet the ground with foliage, now I will show how the same applies above our head. I do not want to be the tallest thing in a garden I want to be hugged to the ground by a canopy of trees and shrubs.



The colour and shape of the foliage in the trees and shrubs can contrast just as well as the ground hugging plants they change the environment by casting shade – obviously we do not go for a complete overhead cover as we do with the ground level plants but ensure that some areas are open to the full light.

On a warm day we can feel a distinct change in temperature as we walk around our garden moving in and out of shade - also it is noticeable that the humidity is greater in the shaded areas. Just as with the ground cover plants our aim is to mix foliage types, colours, shape and form in the trees and shrubs we use to bring variety and interest.



As well as the many shades of green the main colour variation is between the red and green leaved forms of Acers – the pinnate leaves of the Sorbus add more variety. The emergence of the leaves forming a canopy has a great effect on the feel and look to our garden – in winter it can feel open and exposed above but once the deciduous canopy has fully emerged there is a feeling of being enclosed, covered by the multiple colours and shapes of the leaves which go through various stages from the very fresh young leaves to the brilliant colours many adopt in the autumn.



A selection of Acer leaves, many grown from seed.



Acer seedlings

Last year I remember mentioning the abundance of Acer flowers on our trees which I suggested would lead to lots of seed and indeed as I am weeding around the gravel areas I am finding many seedling Acers. I will watch them and lift them when I think they might be in the way and or liable to be stepped on – then I will either plant them into a suitable spot or pot them up until I decide what to do with them. My trouble is that I love trees as much as I do bulbs but I know they take up so much more space and I cannot keep them all.



I have been observing this nice red leaved self-sown seedling growing in a border for about three years now.



The majority of the Rhododendrons we grow are evergreen helping to unify the garden throughout the year. As well as giving structure they also bring colour firstly from their flowers then also from the new emerging leaves.

Colourful bracts like these red ones on Rhododendron decorum provide a striking contrast with their dark green leaves and also with the red-leaved Acer that towers above.



**Rhododendron decorum and red-leaved Acer**



This species is typically yellow here is the lovely white form - **Rhododendron wardii var. puralbum.**



*Rhododendron selense jucundum*



**Rhododendron fortunei** has large, beautifully scented flowers. Both these plants were growing under the five trees we took down earlier in the year and they were suffering from being in the shade now they are the tallest thing in this bed I hope they will grow better.



**Rhododendron yakushimanum**



The upper most level in this scene is dominated, on the left, by a red Acer seedling a distant green Sorbus, then Acer platanoides 'Crimson King' then behind and to the right are more green Acers raised from seed. The next level down is formed by some of the larger shrubs mostly Rhododendron with a 3 plus metre high tree Paeonia lutea var ludlowii right of centre.



***Paeonia lutea* var *ludlowii***



Megan and Molly look on in this wider view showing how we use the space above the garden as well as on the ground. Successive layers starting with the trees, then larger shrubs followed by smaller shrubs all of which are surrounded and under planted with the bulbs, herbaceous, etc.



Having this many trees and shrubs in our garden does require a lot of management and we regularly thin out the canopies finding a balance between giving a good tree cover while still allowing adequate light through to the plants below. The pine in the foreground was raised, all the lower branches removed, just over a year ago opening up a planting opportunity below

and to help keep it compact, it is candle pruned every year. You can see more on this in a recent [Bulb log video diary supplement](#) if you have not viewed it already.



You may have spotted the blue of *Corydalis pseudobarbispala* growing to the right of the pine in the previous picture.



**Fritillaria pallidiflora**



A few fritillaria are still in flower such as *Fritillaria pallidiflora* which is now self-seeding around in the garden and *Fritillaria affinis*, yellow form, which has never set any seed for us but increases by rice grain bulbils that form on the new bulbs.

**Fritillaria affinis yellow**



We should not forget the decorative ways that the trunks of trees and shrubs can be used such as for framing views - the above picture features the decorative cinnamon coloured peeling bark of an *Acer griseum* framed by the trunks of a *Rhododendron*.



**Acer seedling**



**Acer griseum**



***Sorbus hupehensis***



***Betula utilis*, red barked form**



***Betula utilis* var. *jacquemontii***



***Acer* 'Osakazuki'**



***Primula pulverulenta***



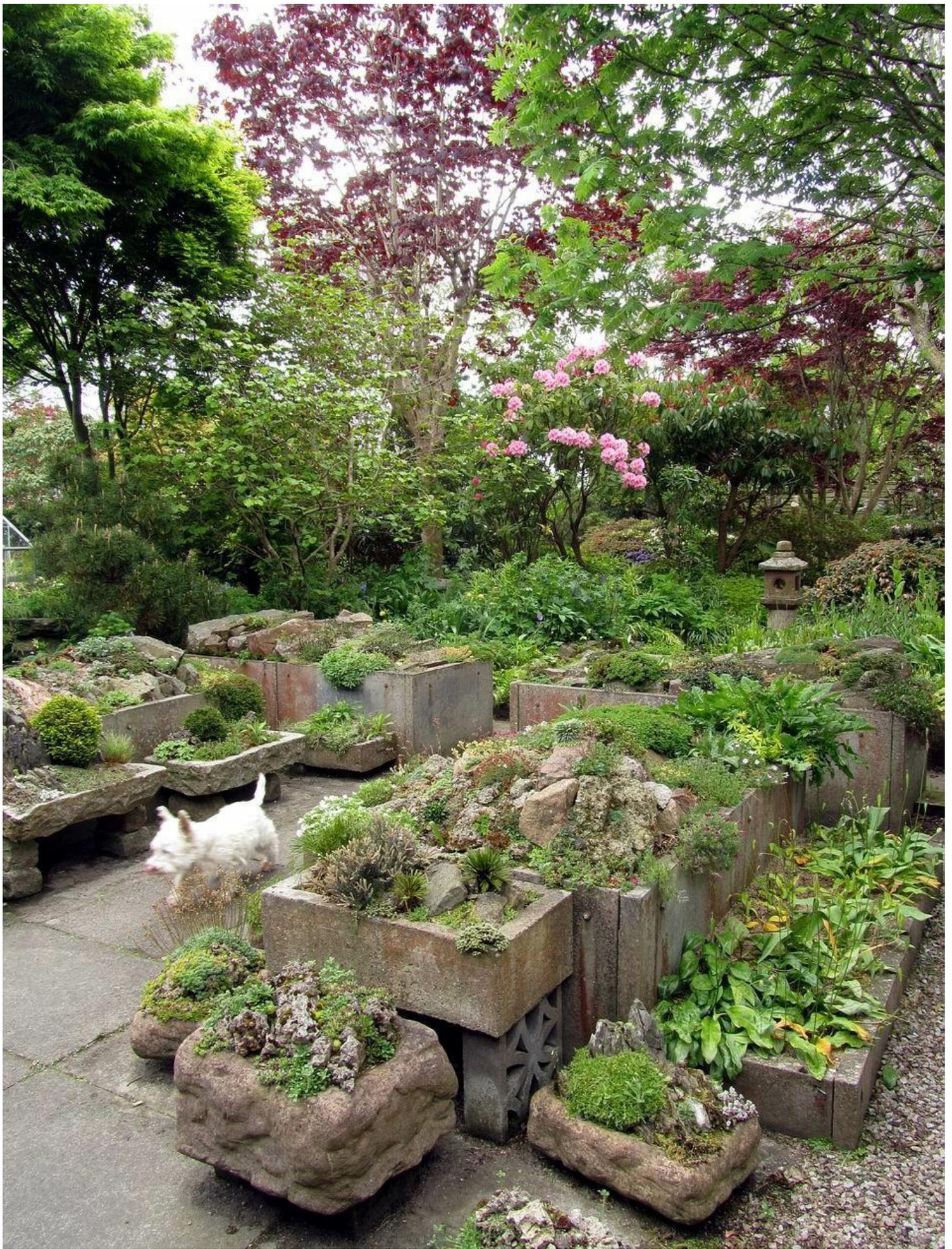
The bright magenta coloured flowers on white farina covered stems bring additional colour to the front garden with an Acer griseum trunk in the background.



The cloud-pruned ***Chamaecyparis obtusa nana gracilis*** in the front garden is awaiting its spring trim is one of the trees we did not remove when we reworked the front garden over the last few years – it is over 40 years old. Also in view are forms of *Pinus sylvestris*, *Acer*, *Rosa*, and *Sorbus*.



The tall fastigate form of ***Pinus sylvestris*** is a dominant feature of the front garden as well as the street and at thirty plus years old it stands well over 5 metres tall.



The closing image this week brings together most of our interests – the troughs and raised beds with many alpines, the bulbs and woodland plants beyond and of course the backbone of the garden trees and shrubs. Not to mention the small whites.....