



BULB LOG 41.....14<sup>th</sup> October 2015





### **Colchicum agrifolium**

If I could only choose one colchicum to have in our garden it would be *Colchicum agrifolium*.

Its tessellated flowers are produced in profusion, its bulbs increase at a goodly rate, plus the medium sized leaves, which emerge in the spring, work well with and do not dominate other plants.

Last year I lifted a clump of bulbs that needed to be split from a rock garden bed which, after replanting about ten back, left me with some 50 to plant elsewhere.



### **Colchicum agrifolium**

I planted these in the front garden, spacing them out so that each bulb has room to increase. Some were planted in open groups as above while others were planted individually to help draw the eye around the garden.

Here Autumn Crocus and Autumn Colchicum are flowering through a bright carpet of Hamamelis leaves.



Most of the pictures in this week's Bulb Log need little commentary from me as they are celebrations of the autumn garden where early flowering bulbs put up their colourful display. I know that these are often referred to as late flowering bulbs however it is the spring flowering ones that are the late comers as all these plants started forming their flower

buds before they entered dormancy in spring/summer with these flowers waking early in the autumn. As some plants have already lost their leaves others, such as Primula, enjoying the cool moist conditions will grow on until the day length becomes too short or the frosts come.



*Colchicum speciosum* album flowers supported by *Aquilegia* leaves.



Among the companions that can work well with the Colchicum leaves are Aquilegia, Helleborus, Allium, Lilium. Here the backdrop of foliage is provided by Rhododendrons and a few self-seeded Paeonia lutea.



Simple things can bring me great pleasure in the garden and there is always something I can find to photograph here. A young *Erodium* plant is joined by some fungi and a single autumn leaf fallen from an *Acer*.



Allowing plants to do their own thing in the garden brings great benefits – the row of stones at the top represents the edge of the original bed there was then a 15cm strip of gravel before the paving slabs the Mossy saxifrage and the Cyclamen have all self-sown as have some Oxalis; claiming this strip as their own.



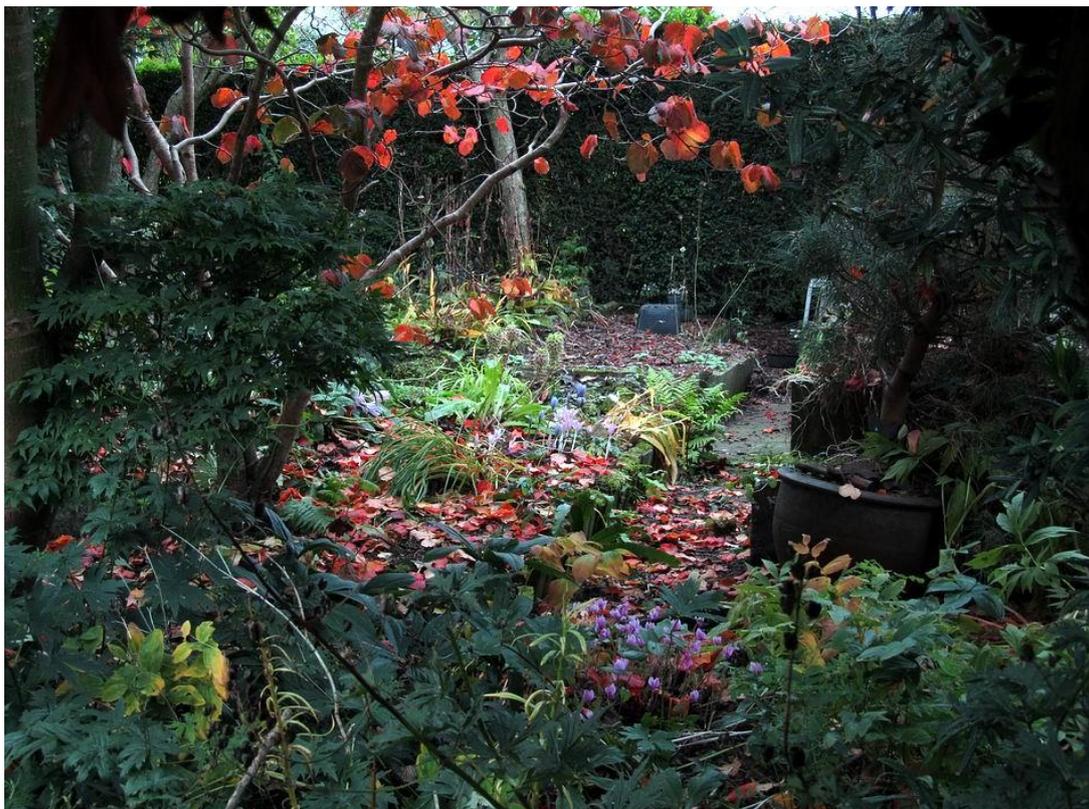
A group of the bargain florists' cyclamen I showed the other week sit on our front door step with a pot of **Colchicum cilicium** (won in the SRGC Discussion Weekend Auction) behind – as soon as the flowers of the colchium fade I will plant the bulbs into the front garden.



I cannot over-emphasise the importance of structure in a garden – we have used trees and shrubs of varying heights and sizes to give our garden a permanent but changing structure. The garden can feel quite open in the winter but when the taller deciduous trees come into leaf the feel is much more enclosed, especially overhead, while evergreens provide year round structure allowing dramatic lighting of light and shade as we move around.



Visitors will often bemoan that their garden is flat - well so was ours that is why we used the trees and shrubs to create a structure of shape and form. Some parts feel enclosed restricting your view then as you move there is an opening allowing some longer vistas attracting you to move round to another area.

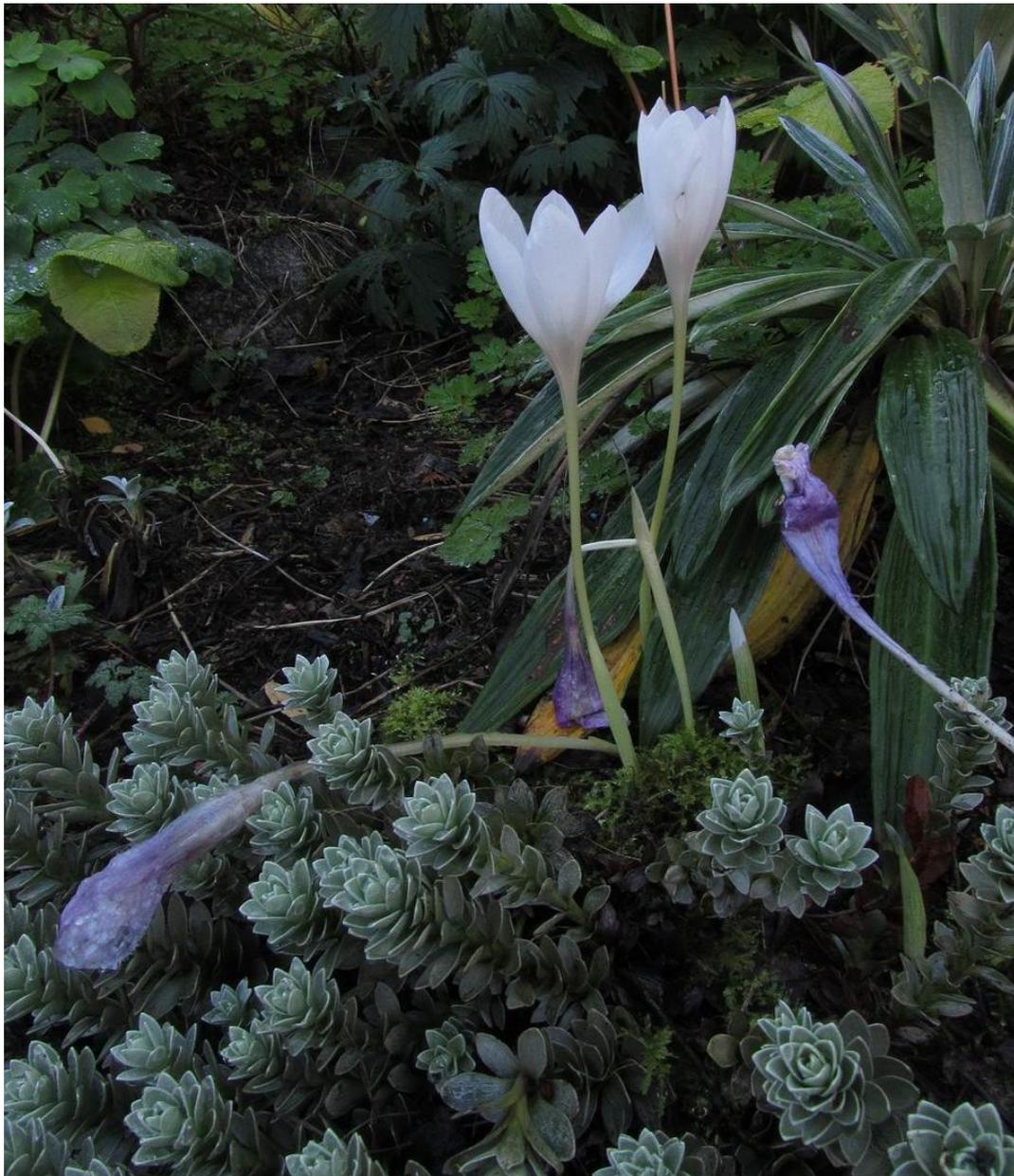




The weather has encouraged this *Rhododendron taliense x lacteum* to open its flowers now as the *Sorbus* leaves are turning.



Dramatic backlighting allows us to appreciate the branch structure of *Rhododendron elegantulum*.



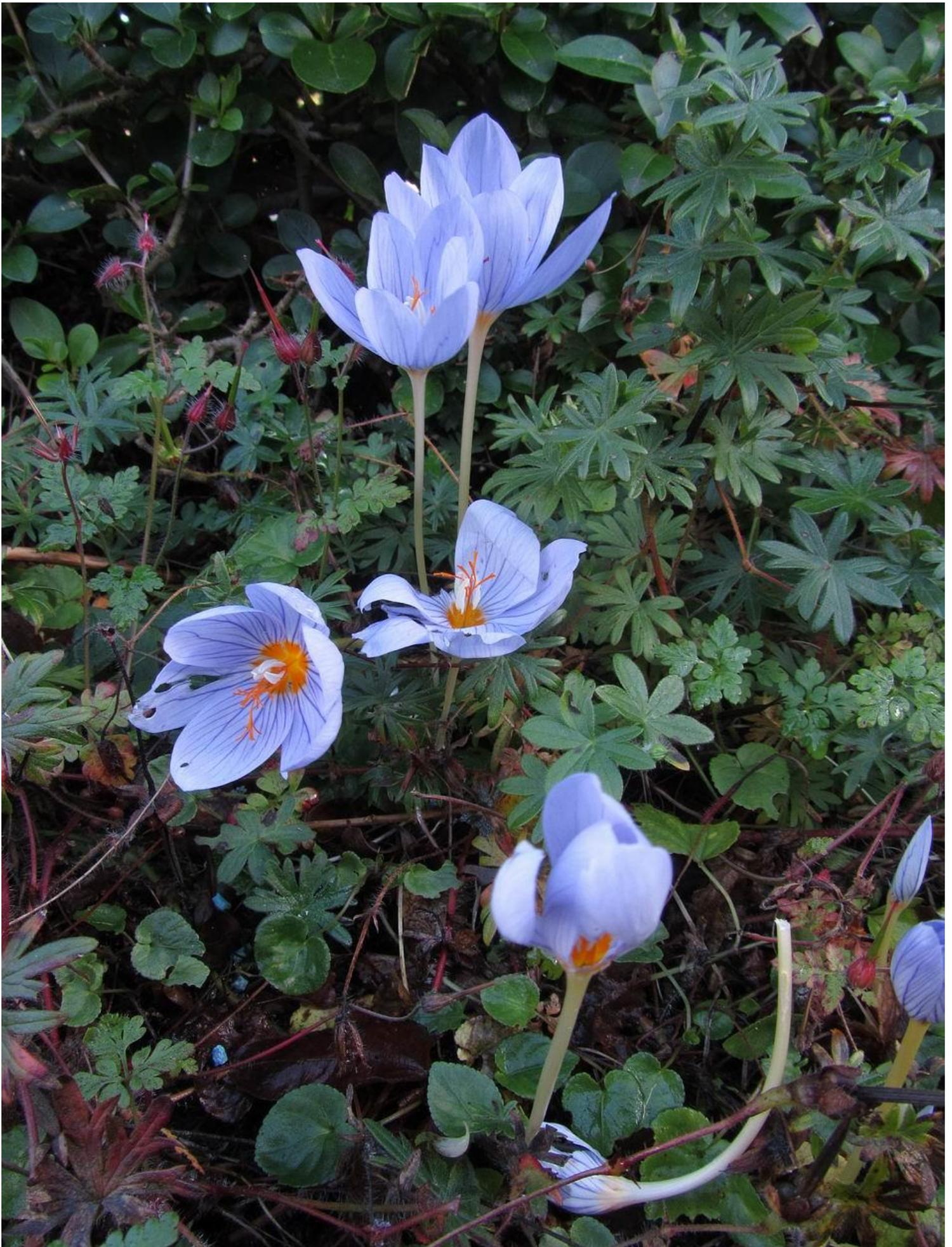
Autumn crocus of many species and hybrids, such as *Crocus nudiflorus*, are appearing all around the garden.

For longer than I have been writing the Bulb Log I have been trying to discourage people from calling *Colchicum* “autumn crocus”.

I know that this misuse of the common name is widespread being used by beginners and experts alike but my question to them is **if we continue to call *Colchicum* ‘autumn crocus’ what can we call the real autumn crocus?** Anyway, how difficult can it be to call them autumn colchicum?

There are many other common names for *Colchicum* such as naked ladies and naked boys which are fine - it is when the botanical name for the genus *Crocus* is applied to *Colchicum* which is not even in the same family that I object.

Truth is always a good thing, I would hope.



A group of *Crocus pulchellus* that have seeded into the front drive are getting a bit chewed by slugs and snails. It has been a “good” year for these pests.

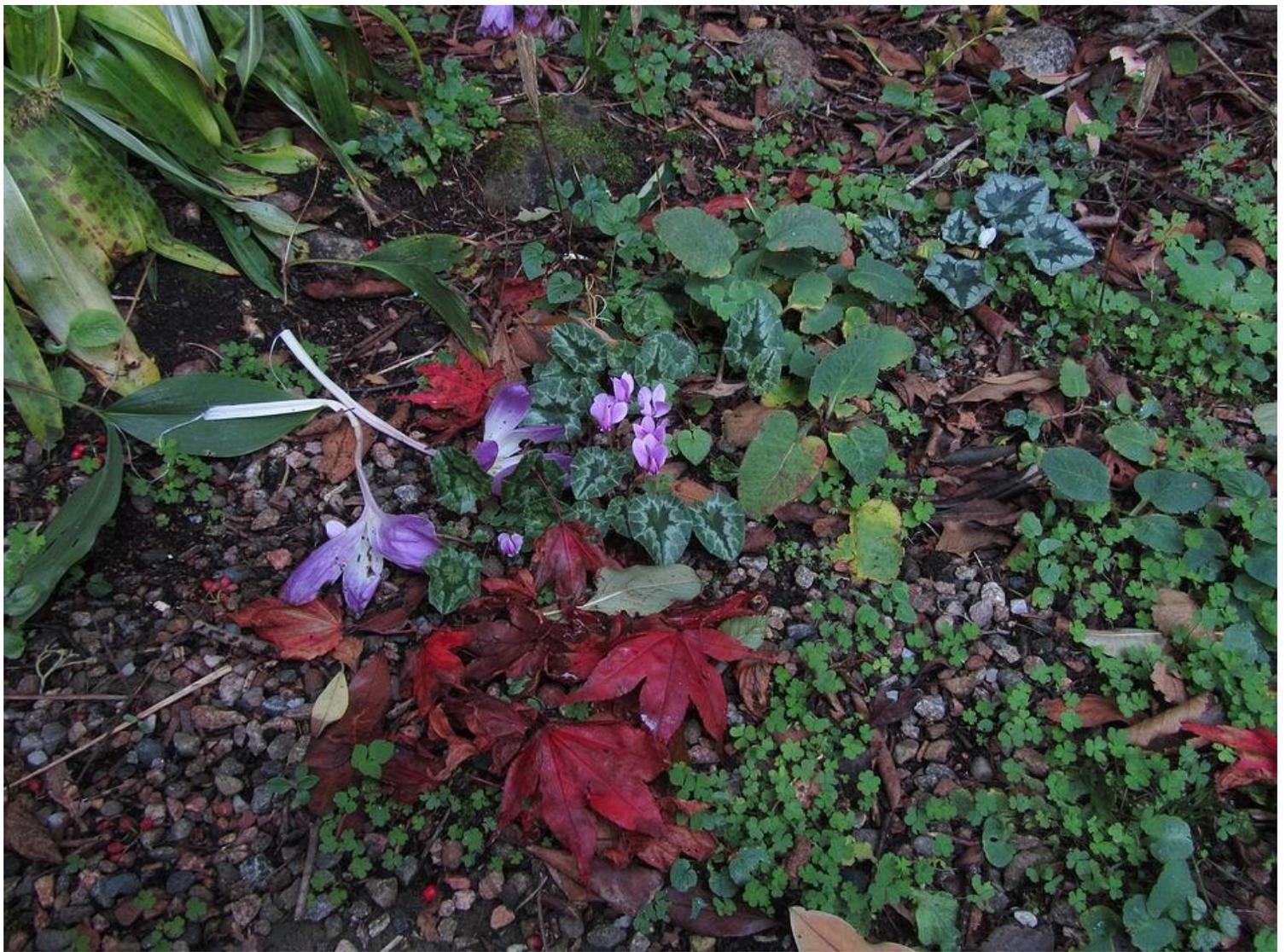


### **Crocus vallicola**

While the trees and shrubs bring structure to the garden it is the bulbs and herbaceous plants that enhance and bring seasonal interest.

Crocus vallicola flowering through the red leaves fallen from an Acer.





Another area of gravel has become populated by many self-sown seedlings, some welcome some not so.

A number of small Oxalis seed and run all around the garden and sometimes I wish we had never introduced them.

All the weeding here is done by hand with the rule being that you do not pull it out until you have identified it.

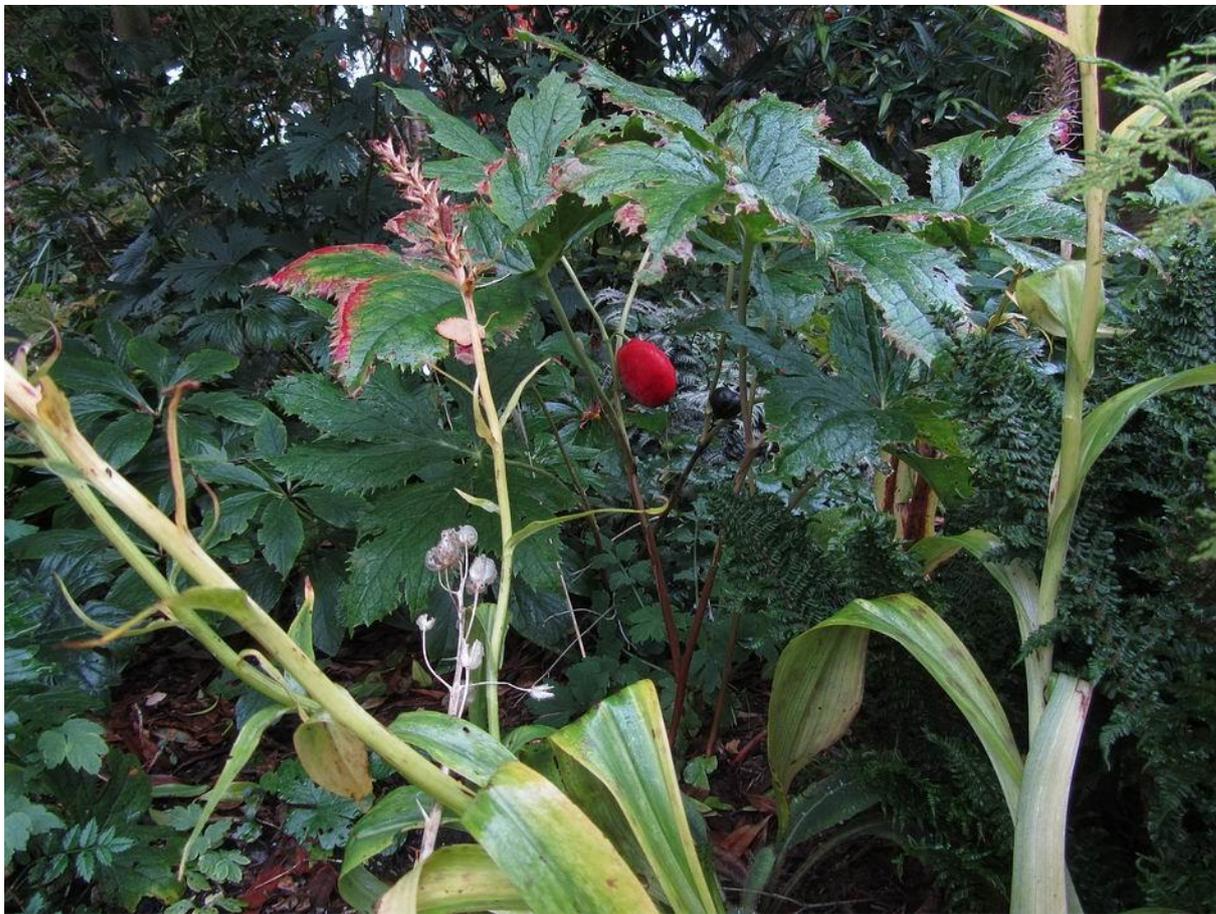
The Cyclamen, Meconopsis and Hepatica will be left while many of the others will be weeded out.



Silver leaved forms of *Cyclamen hederifolium* bring lightness into some of the beds shaded by tall acer trees – their leaves will get plenty of light through the winter and spring while the trees are bare.



Some selective weeding will also have to be done in the rock garden bed.



As I walk around I am constantly seeing interesting autumn moments.

Here my eye was caught by the red ripe fruit on a **Podophyllum peltatum** while a few steps further on I see the flowers of **Colchicum autumnale album** appearing through self-sown **Pseudofumaria alba**.

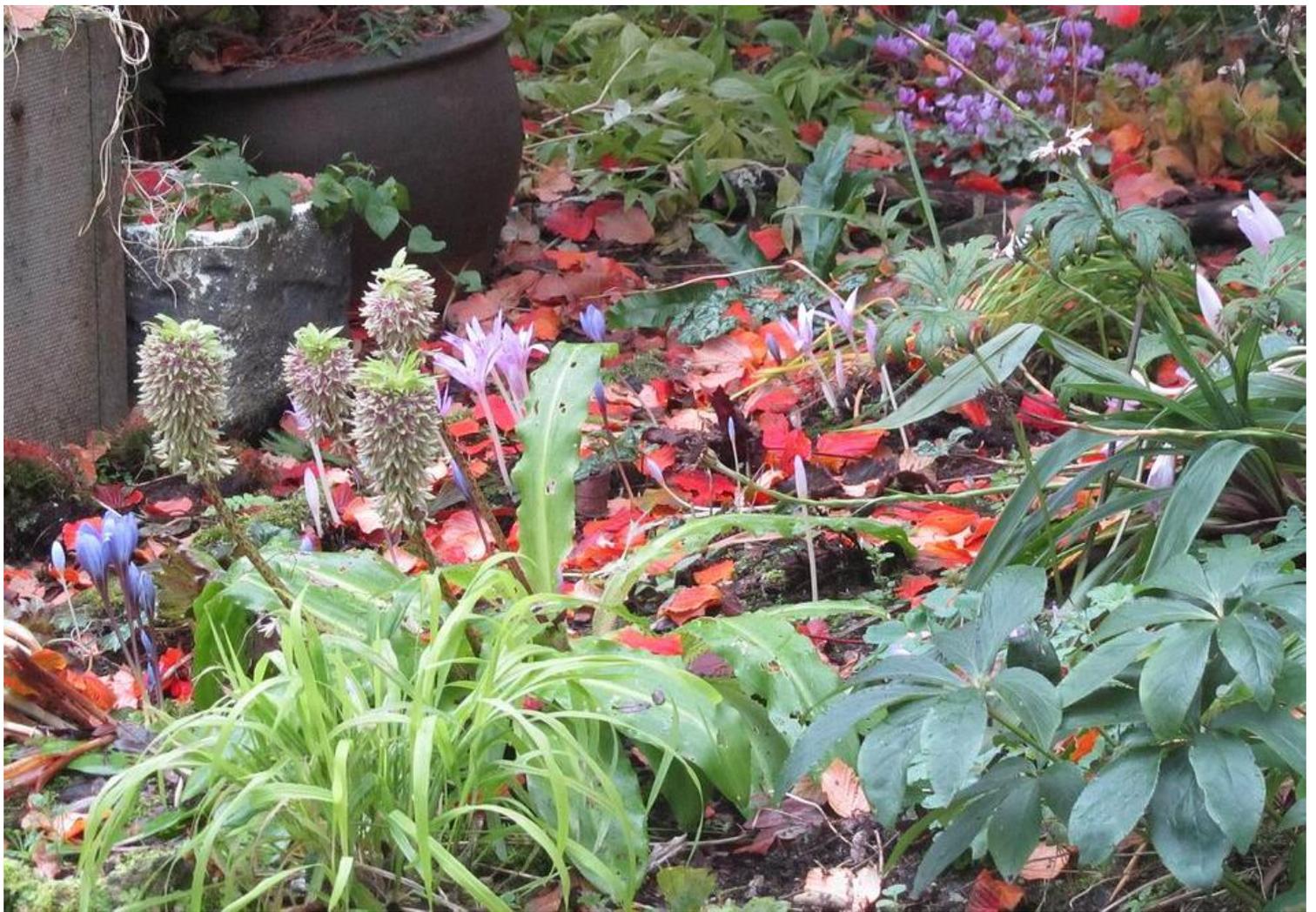


**Colchicum autumnale album and Pseudofumaria alba**



The *Pseudofumaria* are very willing volunteers; seeding around everywhere. The choice to accept them or remove them is ours.

The *Sorbus* leaves brought down by the recent winds and rain will have to be removed from the raised beds and troughs quickly to prevent them doing damage to the alpines they are covering.



I do not see the autumn as the end of a season but as a beginning for while many herbaceous plants are in retreat before the onset of winter other plants are flowering.

Eucomis bicolor, Colchicum and Crocus all flower now in the hope that they will attract insect pollinators to fertilise them, starting off the seed process.



Also this is the time I am sowing most of the seeds we have collected through the season plus in the bulb houses the new growth from the recently watered bulbs is growing at a pace so it is far from the end of a season much more like the start of a cycle to me.



**Crocus speciosus and Eucomis bicolor**

Check out the latest [Bub Log Video Diary Supplement](#) to see more from our autumn garden.....