



SRGC

Bulb Log Diary

ISSN 2514-6114

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BULB LOG 37.....13th September 2017





Colchicum speciosum album

Many of the signs of autumn are visible in this week's cover image - the light from the low sun highlighting the group of mixed Colchicum flowers, seed pods can be seen on Meconopsis, Primula, Fritillaria and lilies, the herbaceous leaves are turning and the first leaves are falling from the trees. What I cannot show is the falling temperature that is one of the significant changes that triggers the autumn flowering bulbs into action. It is often stated that it is the autumn rains which trigger these bulbs

but that is only part of the equation because it is the cold rain which causes the ground temperatures to cool rapidly which is the key trigger –the presence of ground moisture is of course essential to the good growth of the roots.



More evidence that this is autumn is visible in this picture featuring **Crocus speciosus hybrids**.



Crocus speciosus
subsp.
xantholaimos

The yellow throat distinguishes *Crocus speciosus* ssp. *xantholaimos* and it has proved to be a great introduction to our garden. The first batch of seedlings we flowered grew well both under glass and in the garden and all subsequent generations of garden seed has produced hybrids. As well as being fully fertile and producing seeds the hybrids are generous and form offsets resulting in groups.



Crocus speciosus: note the white throat of the typical of the species.

The **Crocus nudiflorus** forms running through the Erythronium sand plunge continue to delight us - more flowers open before being flattened by the wind and rain. Perhaps the message is that we should grow these bulbs in association with low growing plants which the flowers can grow through and be supported by.



Crocus nudiflorus



Crocus nudiflorus and can you spot the solitary **Crocus speciosus**?



***Crocus speciosus* subsp. *xantholaimos* hybrids** growing in the sand bed (which I covered in cobbles in an attempt to stop the mice from digging up and eating all our crocus corms)- so far it seems to be working as a deterrent. We lose too many *Crocus* to mice especially at this time of year and it is an ongoing challenge – we are never going to get rid of the mice so I need to find ways to prevent or at least hinder this activity.



This picture is blurry because it was taken at some distance and through the wet kitchen window - it was also raining at the time - but you can see the mouse which instead of digging up the crocus was eating the Geranium and Viola seeds - something I am quite happy to accept.



Sadly the cobbles do not prevent the slugs and snails which along with the wind and heavy rain fell many a Crocus flower. Slugs and snails are another of the great challenges facing gardeners especially in moderate and moist climates like ours which greatly favour these slimy foragers.



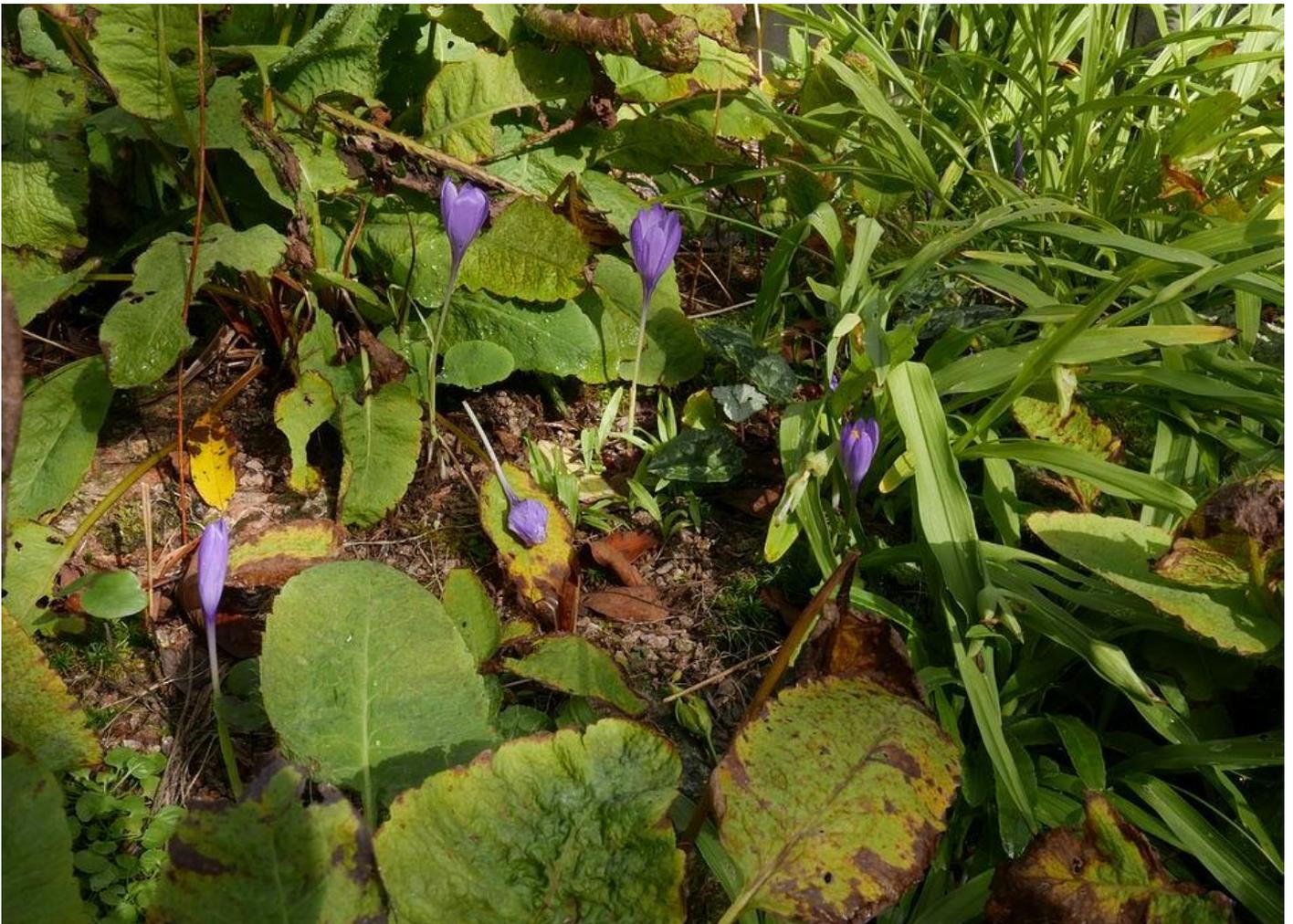
Inadvertently I may have discovered another deterrent to the mice – partly through laziness but informed by my desire to get closer to nature in the way we plants grow I have allowed the mosses and *Sagina procumbens* (Pearlwort) to grow on another sand bed where the crocus were previously ravaged by mice – they have not dug since I have allowed this surface growth - here is hoping that continues to be the case.



A good layer of gravel is another partial deterrent to the mice as you can see here in another typically autumnal scene.



More **Crocus speciosus** flowers on the rock garden after a day of battering by wind and rain.



Crocus nudiflorus flowered appearing among the Meconopsis and Roscoea foliage, also the recently emerged leaves of some Cyclamen hederifolium.



Colchicum agrippinum

Further along the same bed the flowers of *Colchicum agrippinum* (well-chewed by slugs) also share a space with self-seeding colonies of some of the smaller species of *Roscoea* namely *Roscoea sillicifolia* and *Roscoea alpina*.





This is one of the times that we start managing the growth on the woody plants in the garden as we cut back trees, shrubs and hedges, pressing my trusty shredder into action to reduce the volume of material and turn it into a valuable garden mulch.



It used to be that I would carry all the bags of shredded material to the top of the garden emptying them into the compost areas only to have to carry the composted material back out again around January to spread it as a mulch. Again I am not sure if it is down to wisdom or laziness attached to increasing age but for the last few years at this time I have emptied the bags of shreadings under the shrubs in the beds where it will be spread. I do sprinkle a handful of a granular balanced fertiliser onto each heap and by January it will have composted sufficiently to be spread out as a mulch saving me a lot of time and heavy carrying.



While working in this area I noticed some bulbs of **Dicentra cucullaria** exposed on the surface where a number of the rice grain like scales had become detached - each of these will form a new plant. I have learnt over the years that to flower well the bulbs of this plant like to be just below the surface – if they are too deep they will only produce leaves. So rather than digging and planting the rice and the bulb deeper I will cover them with some composted mulch much as would happen in the natural woodland environments where this plant grows where a mulch of leaf litter falls annually. The mushrooms are present because of the high organic content of our soil created by years of mulching - this feeds the soil which in turn feeds the plants without the need of us having to add large quantities of chemical fertiliser.



Another heap of shredded material is all but invisible discretely tucked under a Rhododendron.



Veratrum fimbriatum

I return to the plants of *Veratrum fimbriatum* which some weeks on from the first flowers opening continue to look better. So far we have not had seed set on our plants but this is the first year this one has flowered while the other one has flowered for a couple of years. Now I have two plants I decided to cross-pollinate them.



On studying the flowers I find that like so many other plants the pollen of each flower ripens before the stigma is receptive and in this case the three stigma branches extend once the pollen on that flower is gone making it almost impossible for a flower to pollinate itself.



I plucked a flower with ripe pollen from one plant and took it to pollinate receptive flowers on the other plant and vice versa – now I have to hope that the seed of this native of California can be fertilised and grow in our much cooler climate.



Our two plants of **Veratrum fimbriatum** one in the back garden (above) and the other in the front garden (below).





Since I watered last week there are already the first signs of a green moss growth of appearing in some areas of the bulb house sand beds. I prevent this by carefully raking the sand with a small rake I made but as I now have sand beds in more than one bulb house I decided I needed a second raking implement so I used a table fork which was ok but after a slight modification of bending the prongs and spacing them out slightly turned it into the perfect tool for the job.





This **Cyclamen mirabile** had seeded itself into a pot of Crocus so I decided this year that I would transfer it into one of the sand beds and this gave me the opportunity to examine the roots where I could see the white growth of the new feeding roots emerging from the thicker darker older roots.



Cyclamen mirabile in its new home.



I originally planted out a group of silver leaved **Cyclamen hederifolium** seedlings here and now they are adding to the colony by self-seeding – look carefully and you will see the new small seedling leaves. As we have no ants in our garden to distribute the seeds they germinate in clusters where the capsule falls and sometimes that is right on top of the parent corm so I do have to intervene and do some redistribution of the seedlings.



***Cyclamen hederifolium* silver leaf forms.**



Other variations showing the decorative value of *Cyclamen hederifolium* leaves.





Colchicum speciosum album

Now I return to an emerging group of Colchicum speciosum album flowers and if you have not found my Video Diary Supplements do visit my [YouTube channel](#) they are all there to be viewed but before you go I will be giving a talk on growing Narcissus at the SRGC Late Bulb Day please check out the notice below and come along.....

GROWING NARCISSUS

www.srgc.net

A talk by Ian Young



Scottish Rock Garden Club – Late Bulb Day 2017
Ruthrieston West Church Halls, Broomhill Road, Aberdeen
AB10 7LN

Display, sales and three great talks - ALL WELCOME!

There will be three talks, plants for sale - please bring along any plant material for the non-competitive display.
A friendly welcome to all plus all day refreshments.



The Talks + the Speakers

10 - 11am: Mathew Topsfield will talk about Narcissus in Southern Spain, following in the footsteps of the great Narcissus collector, John Blanchard.

12 – 1pm: Ian Young will talk about growing Narcissi and other bulbs.



2 -3pm: Dave Millward will talk on autumn bulbs of Southern Turkey and Lebanon.

