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# Bulb Log Diary

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BULB LOG 34.....22<sup>nd</sup> August 2018





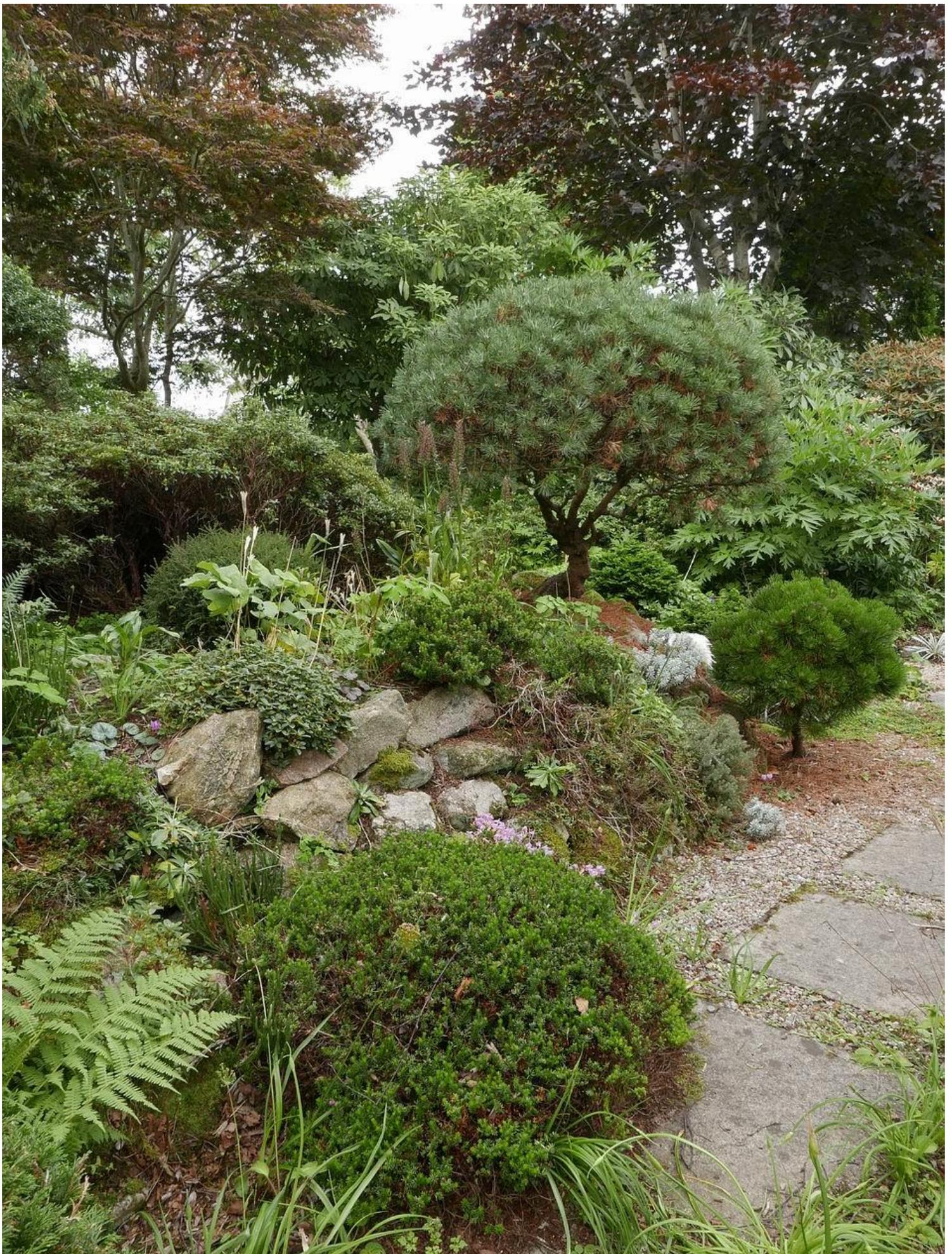
**Rhododendron pumilum** was described by Joseph Dalton Hooker in 1851 although it was not successfully introduced to cultivation until 1924 when Kingdon Ward collected seed, hence it is commonly referred to as Kingdon Ward's Pink Baby. The peak flowering for rhododendrons is in the spring but in favourable conditions some

also have a secondary flowering in the late summer - regular readers will be familiar with these as I feature them most years. However as a result of this year's hot dry summer not many have produced this second flush of flowers (yet) except this little *Rhododendron pumilum*, which is flowering better now than it has ever done for us.

Every year the weather will suit some plants better than others and as our normal summers tend to be cool and moist we have favoured growing plants that thrive in such conditions. Growing on the wall above is another dwarf *Rhododendron calostrotum* subsp. *keleticum*. This has grown vigorously in the cool moist conditions, its prostrate



branches spreading out through the humus rich surface layers, built up by years of mulching, and rooting as they go. This year it has suffered some die back to the branches furthest out from the original planting and I suspect that these branches have come to rely more on the layered rooting in the surface zone, which this year has dried out.



This view gives the overall picture of these plants; the *Rhododendron pumilum* is peeking out from behind a large specimen of *Phyllodoce caerulea*, one of a number I raised from seed collected in Japan while *Rhododendron keleticum* is on the top of the bed and growing down the face.



**Rhododendron elegantulum**

This summer's weather has not been ideal for the large Rhododendrons either. The drought caused many of their flowers to wither before they were fully open also the subsequent growth has been very slow and stunted with much shorter stems and smaller leaves however in many cases the flower bud production looks to be good.



An occasional dry year leading to shorter growth is not such a bad thing; in fact it will spare us the need to have to cut some growth back to preserve ground planting space but the plants would not do so well long term if these conditions were going to become a regular occurrence.

**Rhododendron rex  
ssp. fictolacteum**



The shoots **Rhododendron bureavii** with very small new leaves are holding on to the dried out remains of the flowers – it is possible that the leaves will continue to grow if the cooler wetter conditions return before the frosts.



Seeing Molly on top of this central raised bed draws my attention to another couple of *Rhododendron calostrotum* subsp. *keleticum* plants that need some of areas of die back to be cut out.



As I described last week this is another day where one job is triggering another and as you see I have cleared much of the top edge along this north facing side. Notice the *Haberlea rhodopensis* that I planted into the face of the wall earlier this season have settled in well despite the warm dry conditions.



In the course of clearing I removed some branches from a very dark flowered form of *Rhododendron campylogynum* but these will not go to waste – I will use the shoots as cuttings and the rest will be shredded, composted then returned to the beds as a mulch.



To prepare the cuttings I cut the tips leaving around 1cm of mature wood and remove any leaves from the bottom of the stem. These have been placed in sand under mist for a few weeks then I will turn the mist unit off, cover the cuttings with a thin film of plastic where they should callus and root over the winter providing I keep the sand moist.

The fact that some have flower buds will not stop them rooting but it may slow down the future growth of side branches - ideally it is best if they are non-flowering shoots.



These are two year old cuttings of *Rhododendron dendrocharis* and *primuliflorum* that were treated exactly the way I describe above and have been growing in a box of sand (see picture below) waiting for me to find somewhere to plant them – now I have that place.



Cuttings growing in box of sand.



I mixed in some humus from the compost heap and planted those two cuttings towards the edge of the raised bed.

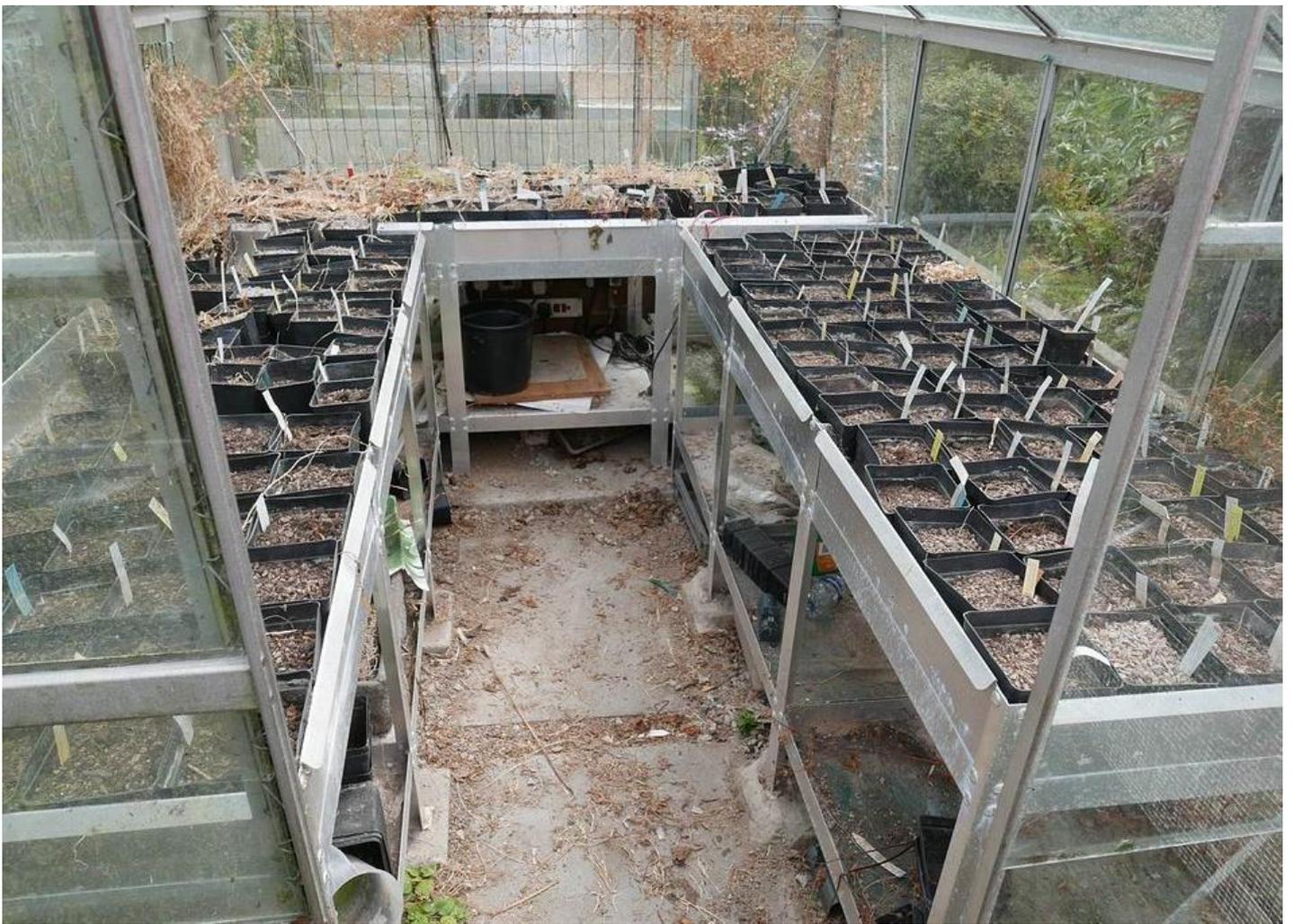


### **Eranthis 'Guinea Gold'**

Other jobs included splitting and replanting some of the outside boxes where I grow selected bulbs. Growing them in boxes makes it easy for me to tip them out check the growth then replant them back into fresh compost every year. Eranthis 'Guinea Gold' has knobby tubers with many points of growth and you can cut these up with a blade and each 'knobble' should grow on but I have found that these rot very easily through the exposed wounds so I prefer to leave them until the knobbles grow out and naturally divide from the parent tuber.



**Corydalis 'Craigton Red'** is of the *solida* group and these tubers naturally divide most years. In the best growing years I have had one strong growing tuber turn into four flowering-sized in one season however with the long cold winter and unusually hot dry spring and summer this has not been the best year for these cool moisture loving subjects.



I am also working my way through repotting the bulbs in the bulb houses where I am finding mixed results.

Every year brings different challenges: some, such as watering and feeding, we have control over, others are dependent on the prevailing weather and the tolerance of the bulbs. For a combination of these variables this has not been the best year for some of our bulbs. This pot of *Narcissus bulbocodium* has done well where a reasonable growth and rate of increase has allowed me to fill the pot and have some left over for planting out in a raised bed.





These *Narcissus romieuxii* bulbs have also done reasonably well but the growth of the bulbs is not as good as I would expect.



The next pot, also *Narcissus romieuxii*, is a disappointment with the bulbs having broken down into many small bulbs sitting within the dried out remains of last year's tunic.



Rubbing what remains of these bulbs gently between my hands cleans off the old husks and reveals the survival tactics of these bulbs has worked and I am left with a quantity of smaller bulbs to build back to flowering size over the next few years.

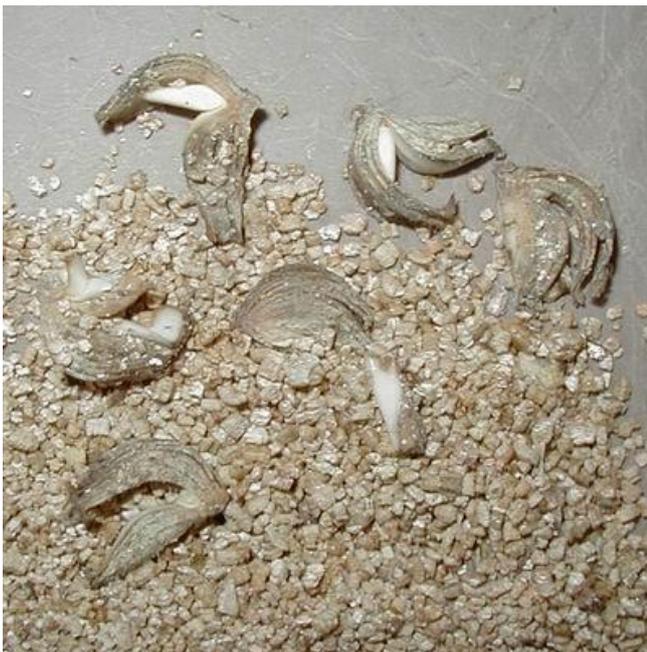
On reflection this has been an exceptionally challenging growing season for the bulbs in pots, firstly the long cold winter meant that some of the bulbs did not make sufficient roots to fully support the growth so the plant had to use up more of the stored energy to support the above ground growth hence smaller bulbs. Then following on from that we had the hottest driest spring and summer we have had for forty years which also will have had an adverse effect on some of the bulbs.



The basal plate of this bulb had rotted away completely but when I inspected the scales I discovered a number of tiny bulbs were forming on the remains of the scales. These secondary growths show that there are multiple buds on the scales of bulbs. These buds are held dormant by messages sent out from the main growth point however if that is damaged or destroyed those messages stop being sent allowing the secondary buds to grow - this is a process we imitate by chopping up the bulb called chitting or twin scaling, see method below.



Start by cutting off the top of the bulb, with a sharp knife, so you have a flat area (top left), then lay the bulb upside down on this flat cut and cut it in half (top right) then continue to cut the bulb into ever smaller sections always making sure that each section has a part of the basal plate, which is the brown bit at the base of the bulb where the scales all join. You can now separate each small segment into two or three scales (twin scaling) and carefully cut them apart so each has a part of the basal plate, finally dust them with some sulphur. Now you need to put the pieces into a labelled plastic bag with some just-moist vermiculite, seal it up and put it in a warm dark place for about six weeks.



Eight weeks later.



Same bulbs one year later

Eight weeks later the latent buds between the leaf scales have already started to form small bulbs (right). At this stage I like especially to check out the ones that are not forming a bulb and if they are showing any signs of rotting I remove them. It is very unusual for the ones forming bulbs to rot away. I also assess the moisture level of the vermiculite and if I think it necessary I add a tiny drop or two of water, better too little than too much.



***Fritillaria reuterii* bulbs**

The *Fritillaria* bulbs I have repotted have mostly grown well this year.



***Fritillaria stenantha* bulbs**

In recent years I have been cutting down on the number of pots of bulbs I grow from three full glass houses to one and have been converting the other plunges to sand beds where the bulbs are growing directly in sand and need no annual repotting.



The former Fritillaria house is now entirely used for mixed bulbs planted directly in sand beds and all I had to do this summer was to remove the dried out plant debris in preparation for the first storm which I will apply in September.



Recently we acquired some South African bulbs including **Strumaria karoocica** to try in the sand and I am delighted to see that it is flowering now extending our period of flowering interest in these beds.



There is a distinct autumnal feeling coming to the garden now.



Fungi are appearing here beside a self-sown Acer seedling.



**Codonopsis grey-wilsonii**

Late summer flowers include the climbers *Codonopsis grey-wilsonii* and *Tropaeolum speciosum* below.



**Tropaeolum speciosum**



Cyclamen purpurascens has not flowered so well this season - again I suspect it is down to the drought - it normally thrives in our humus rich moist conditions.



Different colour forms of **Cyclamen hederifolium** are appearing in a wide range of habitats.





**Cyclamen hederifolium**





**Cyclamen hederifolium**



While many would think of autumn as the end of a growing year I see it as the start of the bulb growing year : as I am preparing to apply the first watering to the bulb houses, the first of the **Crocus nudiflorus** flowers opens.



I will finish off this week with a long established white *Cyclamen hederifolium* that has a corm the size of a dinner plate.....