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Bulb Log Diary

ISSN 2514-6114

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BULB LOG 14.....1st April 2020



Jeffersonia diphylla



Jeffersonia dubia

At a time when the garden has so many colourful flowers I could feature on the front cover I choose instead the emerging leaves of *Jeffersonia diphylla* – I could easily have featured those of *Jeffersonia dubia* also illustrated

above.

It is very easy to be distracted and miss out on observing the highly decorative, intricate structures displayed by the emerging leaves of many plants.

Foliage is very important in a garden - having a much longer season than the flowers, some of which may only last for a few days, so we should be planting for foliage effect. The colour of the *Jeffersonia* leaves will quickly change to green as they also expand revealing their full stature which will happen after we have enjoyed their beautiful flowers.



Another of nature's masterpieces is the striking pleated structure of *Veratrum fimbriatum* leaves.

It was only a few months ago that I spread a mulch across this bed which at that time showed little signs of growth and now it has passed through two waves of colour provided by first the Galanthus followed quickly by Eranthis, Crocus, etc and now it is carpeted with beautiful foliage in full growth.



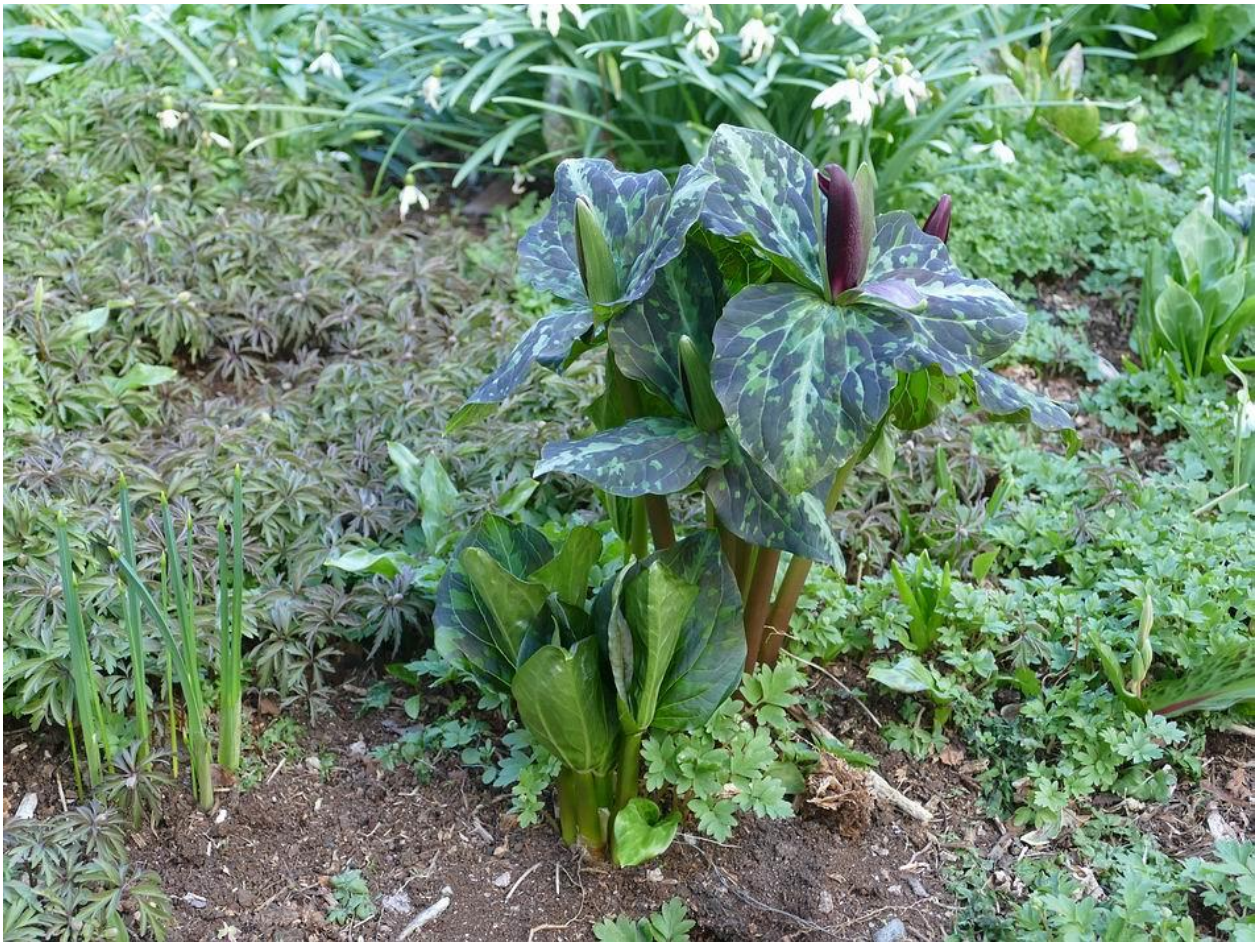
The tapestry effect is mostly provided by **Anemone ranunculoides** which will soon put on a feast of yellow as its flowers open; then the Erythroniums will rise up through this carpet to flower majestically above. When choosing plant combinations it is important that none become so dominating that they inhibit the growth of the companion plants and it is sometimes necessary to intervene and I think that as much as I like this effect later in the year I will thin out the growth of the Ranunculus - just a bit.



I like using wild flowers such as **Adoxa moschatellina** in the garden - many may consider it a weed perhaps because it grows so well. It forms an attractive low grey-green carpet through which the other plants can easily grow, imitating that natural planting effect that we seek to achieve in our garden.



The spikey leaves of *Crocus thirkianus*, whose bright egg yolk yellow flowers have now faded, along with **Scolliopus hallii** whose flowers are so understated that you could easily pass them by, growing through the ground covering *Adoxa moschatellina*.



Staying with the foliage theme the striking leaves of **Trillium kurabayashii** are always at their best before the flowers open: like many plants the beautiful contrasting markings are always at their most intense at the start of the season.



Many of the Erythronium have beautiful decorative leaves such as these **Erythronium revolutum** hybrids bursting through the ground.



The bulb bed has also changed rapidly from being bare ground in January to now being a forest of growth. It is these leaves that will help the bulbs form flower buds for next year so it is important that they are allowed to grow well. Much of this growth is of **Fritillaria imperialis** which being a big bulb can take a few years after flowering to

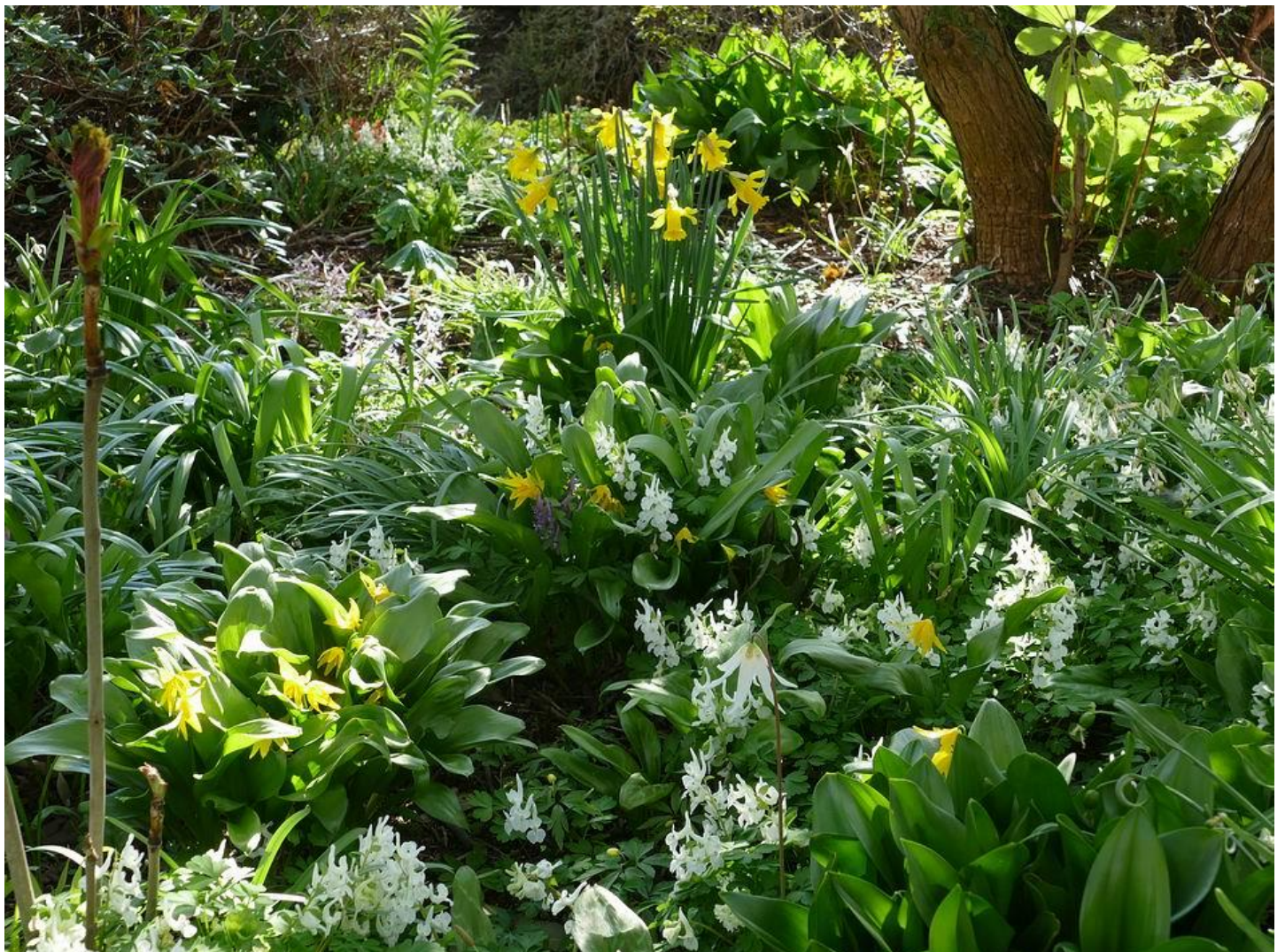
build back up to flowering size - to help I add a sprinkle of 'Growmore' fertiliser around the emerging shoots as soon as they appear that way we get some flowering spikes every year.



In contrast with the spikey foliage of the Galanthus and Leucojum, the soft foliage of Aquilegia, Corydalis and Dicentra combine well and once more the taller growing plants such as Erythronium and Trillium will rise happily up through this green ground covering mulch that will shade the ground keeping it cool and retaining moisture.



The sharp contrast between the light and shade is reflected in the contrasting shapes and textures of the foliage.



Flowers and foliage



The last of the Eranthis flowers with Corydalis malkensis and Narcissus cyclamineus.



We need to carefully consider which plants need more space for their leaves such as the Colchicum whose large glossy leaves are grouped near the base of a rhododendron with the contrasting delicate foliage of the Corydalis solida planted out in front, away from the larger leaves.



Look at the flower stem rising up to the right on this **Erythronium caucasicum** then follow its trajectory as the seed capsule expands weighing it down to the ground and there you will see a cluster of seed spilt from last year's capsule germinating like grass.



Despite the attention of mice or slugs which chewed off some of the Eranthis flower stems just above the leaves I still hope to get some seed on the capsules that remain.



I can see the **Eranthis pinnatifida** seed swelling inside this capsule and I will sow the contents immediately it is ripe. On the right is a pot of seed sown last year with the small single leaf which is the only above ground growth that appears in the first year of germination however we can get the first flowers in the third year of growth.



I normally start all our pots of bulb seed off outside taking those that germinate in the winter into the protection of the bulb house however two weeks ago I moved a number showing no germination into the warmer environment. There are no signs of germination in those with the labels placed upside down then as they germinate I turn the label the right way up. I got this tip from a dear friend, Glassford Sprunt, many years ago and it means that I can easily tell which have germinated and which have not even after they have gone into the summer dormancy.



Narcissus rupicola seeds sown deep last August are germinating now and on the right are some in their second year.



These are the first *Erythronium sibiricum* bulbs that I received many years ago and still the only way I can get them to flower on a stem is to move them into the heat of the bulb house or kitchen window to force the stem to grow. If left to their own devices the flowers try and open underground and have withered by the time the stem eventually pushes them upwards.

Erythronium sibiricum seed starts to germinate around the time mature plants are flowering. Every time you grow plants from seed some will not survive; these tend to be the ones that cannot tolerate your conditions however the ones that do survive obviously can. If you continue to collect and sow the seed from each subsequent generation in your garden then the resulting offspring will become more adapted to your growing conditions.



These are third generation seedlings of ***Erythronium sibiricum*** from our own garden which have fully adapted to growing and flowering normally in our conditions. It is interesting to note that *erythronium* form a relatively small amount of roots also it does not possess a tunic or skin as a protective layer like we see on many other bulbs: both of these are clues that it has evolved in cool moist conditions that did not require a strategy to survive in prolonged hot and dry conditions.



In the bulb houses many of the bulbs have now finished flowering but there is still a good number whose flowering season has yet to start they are currently pushing their way up through the jungle of foliage.



Hermodactylus tuberosus

The bulb house where the bulbs are growing in pots is also a bit of a leafy jungle although there are still many flowers with many more still to come such as the Fritillaria.





This week I turned on the outside water so I no longer need to carry watering cans back and forward also the Sulphate of Potash I ordered arrived in perfect time, just as many of the flowers are fading, for me to give the bulbs a supplementary feed of Potassium (Kallium).





The growth of leaves and stems in many of the bulbs has now ceased for the year so they no longer require nitrogen or phosphorus however as the flowers fade the bulbs switch over to building up the bulb and forming next year's flower in miniature which will rest protected for several months within the bulb until it emerges when the next flowering season comes round. The most important nutrient for bulb growth and flower bud formation is Potassium (Kallium) and I add a small sprinkle of the sulphate of potash to the surface of each pot then water it in. If the bulbs grow on for a long time I may give them a second dose of potassium.





I apply a similar routine in the sand beds where I simply scatter some of the potassium powder across the sand before watering it in.





Growth is steady in the bulb house sand beds with the first of the *Fritillaria* starting to flower along with some *Corydalis*.

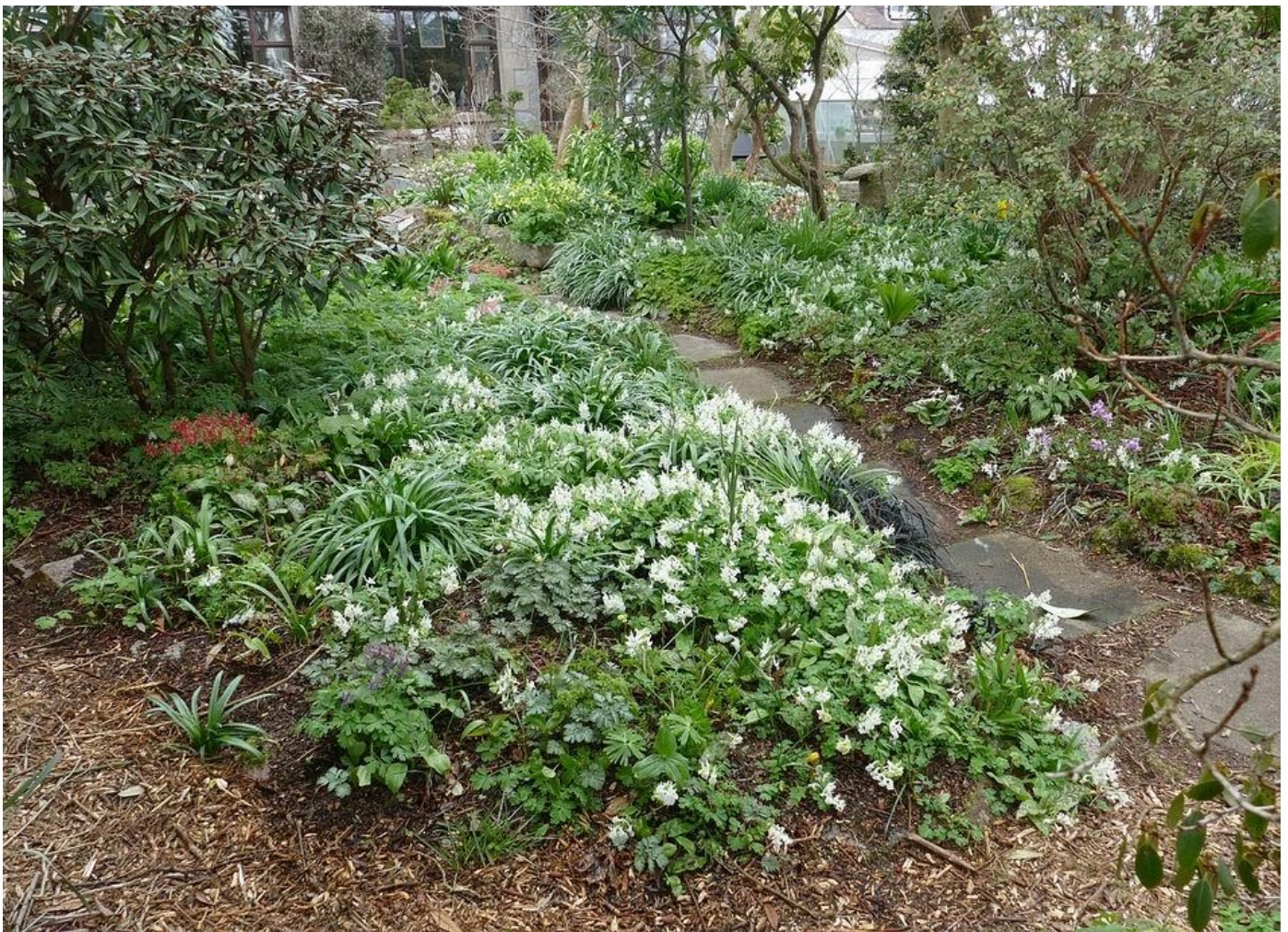


Corydalis nudicaulis



I will return to greenery for the last sequence of images where we can enjoy the incredible variation of shape, form and colour that foliage brings to our gardens.





This is how I like to see the garden where, except for the paths, all the ground is blanketed with carpets of foliage and flowers.



Next week I suspect that I will be returning to full on flower colour.....

[Bulb Log Video Diary Supplement click](#) to join me on a garden walk looking at the flowers on 1st April.