



BULB LOG 27.....8<sup>th</sup> July 2009



**West Drive**



Some weeks ago I showed our west drive in flower with bulbs such as *Fritillaria meleagris* and *Erythronium revolutum*. You can see that the bulbs have set seed and now it is ripe I have been helping to disperse it evenly along the length of the drive.

Now summer is here it is the turn of *Geranium sanguineum* forms to add colour and these plants will flower continually right through the season until the frosts start. The geranium makes an ideal companion for the bulbs because it has no growth above ground through the winter. This means that I can cut away all the dead growth and tidy up the drive in the winter ready for the spring display of bulbs. I also grow a number of autumn flowering bulbs such as *Crocus* and these grow up through the geraniums. When I say I “grow” these bulbs in the drive what I mean is that I have scattered seeds on the deep gravel layer. The gravel between the paving slabs is so compacted it is virtually impossible to dig a hole to plant mature bulbs so seed is the only way.

The drive-way planting was experimental and came to me one day nearly twenty years ago when I was on my hands and knees pulling the weeds out of the gravel and I suddenly realised that this was a long narrow bed mulched in gravel – yes a rock garden.



***Pseudofumaria lutea***



We exploit every bit of space in our garden choosing plants that are suitable for each area. *Pseudofumaria lutea*, formally known to us as *Corydalis lutea* can be considered weedy and invasive, however in the right place this is a great plant and I am happy to let it self seed around the narrow gravel area against the house walls where not many other plants would be happy.

You will also notice that the *Geranium* has seeded itself into the same area by means of its catapult action of seed dispersal which can fling the seeds several metres away from the parent plant.

Our front garden is full of shrubs many of which are over thirty years old now and we have a lot of cutting back to do every year to maintain a balance between the dominant growth and the less vigorous plants.

I mentioned our west drive and that sounds very grand but we do have two drives because our house was originally two small semidetached houses that we knocked into one so we have two drive-ways to exploit.



### **East Drive**

Our east drive has less variety planted as this is the drive where our wee car stays so plants have to be low enough not to have their heads pulled off. Also I only started seeding plants into this drive several years after I found the west drive such a success. I cannot tell you how often we get workmen calling at our door offering to tidy up our “weedy drive-way” and lay lock blocks or tarmac in its place – you can guess the response they get from me. How I wish that there were regulations forbidding people from turning their front gardens into a completely paved over impervious car park.



**Rhodohypoxis in troughs**



### **Rhodohypoxis with rain drops**

In the back garden the troughs full of Rhodohypoxis are just coming to their peak of flowering and how they are enjoying the sunshine we are getting just now. Provided they have plenty of water they can cope with any amount of heat that our Scottish climate can provide and after a night of rain I spent hours taking pictures of all the rain drops suspended like jewels on the flowers. I still water the troughs even though we get rain because they are so densely planted that much of the rain water is shed away from the trough as the flowers act like an umbrella. I also apply a liquid feed with low nitrogen and high potassium, such as tomato feeds, to help build up the small corms and keep the plants healthy. The next time I get a seed set on my Rhodohypoxis I intend to scatter it onto the drives at the front to see if they will grow there.



Many years ago I built this **wooden plunge frame** which is now starting to rot and needs replacing.



## New plunge frame

Having removed the old rotten wooden surround of the frame I had to replace the bottom board of the shed which had also rotted before I built the replacement frame.

I have used these concrete edging strips in the way I built a small sand plunge frame a few years ago – they are just the right size and height for my purpose (3feet long by 6inches high).

I drill holes at the edges of the slabs so that I can wire the joints with strong fencing wire then I place the slabs in position. Using a spirit level I make sure they are approximately level (!) and that the corners are square.

I have made this bed slightly narrower than the old wooden one but then I have wrapped it around the corner of the shed so I have a bit more room in this plunge than I had in the old version.



I find that cutting one of the slabs in half gives me a perfect width to accommodate two of the plunge baskets that I use for bulbs - I can fit twenty two neatly into this rebuilt bed and still leave space for sand all around the baskets.



## **Crocus pelistericus**

I have spent some time repotting all the bulbs in these baskets.

It is very difficult to know just when to repot Crocus pelistericus because it never goes dormant. In our cool moist conditions the leaves stay green until Autumn and they will only go back early if I dry the plant out completely.



## **Crocus pelistericus corms**

At the same time the corms are producing new roots for next years growth these are the white roots that you can see above. These corms have not been touched for two years and you can see how the plant bulks up by producing small offsets which gradually reach flowering size. It is much better to split these every few years because without the competition of the parent the offset corms will reach flowering size that bit sooner.



It is not easy re-potting corms which have leaves, old roots and delicate new roots emerging as well. I add some compost of leaf mould, sharp sand and grit mixed with some bone meal into the bottom of the mesh plunge basket then place the corms around the edges with the leaves draped over the sides. Once I have one row all around the four sides I work my way into the centre adding more rows of corms each with the leaves over the edge of the basket until it is full.



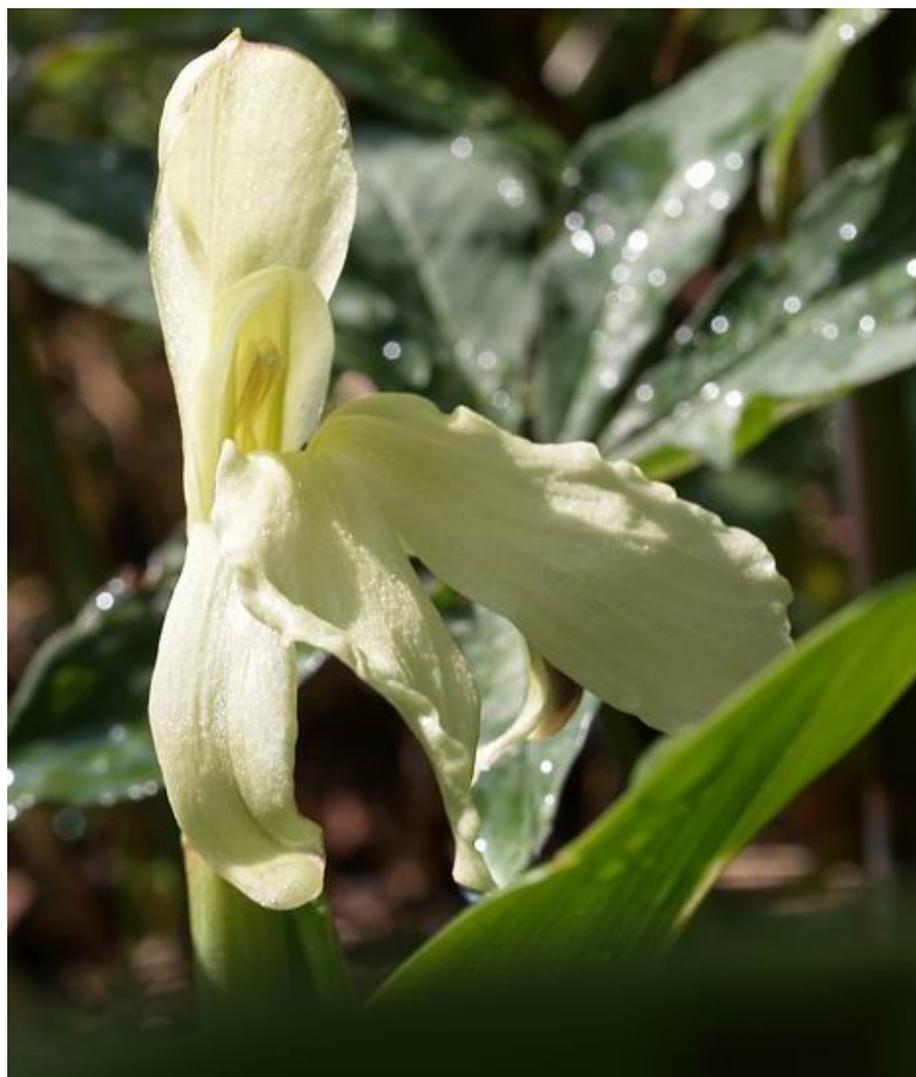
I can now fill the basket up with more compost gently shaking and tapping as I go to ensure the compost goes all the way down through the corms. Next I place a piece of weld mesh over the top of the basket to prevent mice from digging down and eating the corms. Once the basket is in the plunge I will also water it.



Now all the baskets have been replanted I can place them in the frame and fill the gaps with nice sharp sand and that is the frame ready for a top dressing. This frame is for bulbs that enjoy cooler moist conditions so I will top dress it with shredded prunings which I find not only keep weeds down but also helps retain a lot more moisture.



**Roscoea humeana**



**Roscoea humeana  
yellow form**

It is always July before our Roscoea come into flower, having come above ground very late and I am always concerned that they have died away but needless to say they mostly appear when they are ready. Roscoea humeana is possibly my favourite and it comes in purple, as above and yellow, on the left. I have some purple forms that are so dark that they can appear almost black in some lights.

To keep them healthy and increasing I always make sure that they have plenty of water from the time when they emerge until the flowers fade.

I also add some liquid tomato type fertiliser to help build them up when I water them.

I think they are beautiful plants and from the pictures that I have seen of them growing in the wild they are even more dramatic as the flowers appear to come before the leaves emerge.

None are more beautiful to my eyes than the white form below – it is a truly stunning plant and is definitely in my top ten plants of all time.



**Roscoea humeana alba**



**Roscoea tibetica**

I will sign off for this week with the smallest of the species we grow - *Roscoea tibetica*. These are seed raised and I am considering where to plant them so they do not get swamped and for best effect— in a trough or raised bed I think.