



### Sculpture – reclining figure

Many regular bulb loggers will know that my other great interest as well as plants is art and one of the many great artists whose work I admire is Henry Moore. I love his great abstracted reclining figures that are based on natural forms and while repotting the Erythroniums I was reminded of these sculptures.



I am working my way through all my pots and plunge baskets repotting the Erythroniums and other bulbs that are in these **plunge frames**.

It is at least two years since many of these have been repotted and I believe that is the maximum time that you can leave them before the bulbs start to suffer a serious decline. I still firmly believe that you will get the best results if you repot your bulbs every year. It is said that a man should never have a garden

bigger than his wife can look after!!!



### **Crocus nudiflorus corms**

Not all bulbs are well behaved in these sand plunge beds, some like these *Crocus nudiflorus* corms like to wander choosing their own favoured positions to grow in. They just love running around just below the surface of the sand which as you can see is covered and kept moist by a mulch of shredded prunings. The original basket that I planted the *Crocus* in has virtually no corms left in it but the bed is full of this lovely *Crocus*. The lesson that needs to be learnt here is that it is fine for this crocus to go walk-about so long as you are not growing other crocus species in the same bed – then you will get your stocks contaminated by this nomadic species.

### **Fritillaria pyrenaica**

While I have often fancied the idea of having a bigger garden with more space, bigger frames and glasshouses, I am also now sensible enough to realise that at times it is a struggle to keep up to date with all the jobs in the garden we have. Already some plants have to wait more than two years before I get time to replant them and by then I notice that the bulbs have peaked and have started to decline becoming smaller and not flowering so well. The other problem with leaving them too long is that you start to get contamination of your stocks when other stolon forming bulbs move into adjacent pots.



When the interloper is a crocus and the basket has got *Fritillaria pyrenaica* in it I see no problem in letting them share the space – the crocus will flower in the Autumn and the fritillary in the spring so I get two seasons of flower in the same space and I will never have a problem telling the bulbs apart.



### **Erythronium pots on frame**

The decline in vigour is even more noticeable in pots because unlike the mesh baskets they cannot draw on the nutrients from the surrounding ground so well so they get priority when my time is limited



**Erythronium bulbs also have a habit of escaping** but unlike the crocus they do it through the bottom of the pots. I am always careful when I lift the pots from the frame to look out for bulbs escaping through the drainage holes but inevitably some will get broken as above. This is not a disaster as at least one part will contain the dominant growth bud and with a bit of luck the other part, now it is removed from the dominant bud, will form secondary buds so you may end up with two or more bulbs in a years time. Often the bulb is formed half in and half out the pot and it is impossible to remove it without either carefully cutting the pot or breaking the bulb in two. Nowadays I just break the bulb in two because so often when I try and cut the pot away around the bulb I end up cutting the bulbs as well and end up with a broken bulb and a spoiled pot.





### **Escaped Erythronium bulbs**

As well as checking to see there are no bulbs sticking out through the bottom of the pot I also check the ground underneath the pot. Look carefully at the picture above and you will just see the tops of four bulbs sticking out of the ground adjacent to where the drainage holes of the pot were. It was three years since this pot had been touched and there were no bulbs in it at all; they had all escaped into the ground below.



### **Erythronium bulbs**

Even after one year you will find that most Erythronium bulbs will be clustered at the very bottom of the pot. Some Erythronium species, such as *E. oregonum* and *E. revolutum* are more inclined to go deeper quicker.



### **Potting Mixture**

I should mention the potting mix that I use for the Erythroniums which is my current standard potting mix, (above left), which is two parts sharp sand, two parts 6mm grit and one part leaf mould to which I add some bone meal. I then add a bit of extra leaf mould, (right) to this mix to increase the humus content, help hold extra moisture and provide some extra nutrients.



### **Erythronium bulb with offsets**

It is always a pleasure to see Erythronium bulb with offsets – they do not all oblige. Above you can see that as well as forming an offset from the base of the bulb, this one has also formed a smaller offset near the top of the bulb. Some of the vigorous increasers such as *E. tuolumnense*, certain forms of *E. californicum* and a number of hybrids will regularly produce these offsets.

With many of these pots not being repotted for three years I also have to be aware of the possibility of contamination by stray seeds that I have not collected in time and which may have fallen from adjacent plants, germinated and grown on.



### **Erythronium seedling bulbs**

To try and prevent this type of contamination from mixing up my plants I have removed all the small seedling type bulbs that I find in the pots as these are very likely to be seedlings of another species of Erythronium. I plant these seedling bulbs directly into garden beds where I do not mind having mixed colonies – in fact I like such plantings.



### **Second and Third year Erythronium bulbs**

Erythronium seeds have evolved to be sown on the surface and take themselves into the upper layer in their first year of growth. In the next few years they elongate themselves pushing down ever further into the ground. The next season's growth bud forming towards the bottom of the structure – that is how they can take themselves so deeply into the ground in search of cool conditions.



### **Erythronium sibericum bulbs with interlopers**

Above is a good case to illustrate my point - because the bulbs of *Erythronium sibericum* are very distinct from the Western American species of *Erythronium* and easily separated out. The three small bulbs to the bottom left are Western American species of some kind that have seeded into this pot during the last three years; the other five are *E. sibericum*.



### **Erythronium montanum bulbs**

Here are a group of *Erythronium montanum* bulbs which can be separated from most other American species by the shape of the bulb, the lack of tunics, apart from some remnants near the top of the bulb, and also the chains that are the remains of previous year's growths which have not died away completely. The closely related *Erythronium elegans* shares these features so you can never be definitive in identifying them from the bulb alone.



## **Erythronium montanum bulbs**

These Erythronium montanum bulbs show clearly the remnants of the previous year's growth attached like links on chains to the base of the bulb. The chain on the bulb to the left has formed a second bulb as they do have growth buds. These growth buds in the chains mostly remain dormant as long as the main bulb is healthy and still attached.



## **Erythronium montanum bulbs with chains removed**

However if you remove the chains and grow them on in the same way as the parent bulb they will form new bulbs. You can split longer chains into individual links each of which will produce a growth bud and new bulb.

I have been using the term bulb in its widest sense as strictly speaking Erythroniums are corms which replace themselves every year but in my view they also display many of the features of a bulb and so, to me, fall somewhere in between the two types of structure. This just adds to my fascination with them and I will leave you this week with the full colour version of 'Reclining form' and another example of nature's sculpture. I should explain that the reason that these Erythronium tuolumnense bulbs have this wonderful shape is that they hit the bottom of the pot and could not find the drainage hole so were forced to grow sideways along the bottom with just the tops pointing upwards.



**Reclining form 1**



**Reclining form 2**