



BULB LOG 33.....18th August 2010



Wasp and Trillium seed

Last week I showed that I was collecting Trillium seeds -while doing this I left a few seed pods in a tray in the bulb house while I stopped for lunch. When I came back the capsule was almost empty of seeds and it did not take long for me to find the culprit. I watched as a wasp collected a seed and carefully tucked it under its body before flying off with it. Try as I might I could not capture it in flight. What a superb adaptation by the plant this is to greatly increase the distribution of its seeds around a habitat. Using insects is a far more efficient method of seed dispersal than just relying on a simple shaking action and gravity to scatter seeds around the immediate vicinity of the parent plant.



Narcissus bulbs

I am continuing to prepare the bulbs for the first storm and I realise just what a big task it is when I have acquired so many pots of bulbs. I realised a long time ago that people go through a number of phases when collecting and growing plants. The first phase is the acquisitive stage when you try and collect every plant that fits your interest – the rarer the better. Most people grow through this phase but a few will be forever stuck there. I did realise that it was important to me to concentrate my efforts on conserving and preserving a smaller group of plants. However even this smaller number of plants has escalated into so many pots that it becomes difficult to maintain them properly and repot them all every

year. I am now entering another phase, one I have witnessed before in my seniors, where I am trying to preserve the range of plants we grow but reduce the number of them that are growing in pots. This pot of *N. incurvicervicus* is one of the few pots that I have completely emptied out to replant this year – most I am just top dressing. I checked this one because it had gone backwards for a year or two and I needed to see the health of the bulbs. I was pleased to see that with more careful attention to the watering of this pot, especially allowing it to dry out quickly at the end of the growth period, that the bulbs are now growing well and are starting to increase again. While the basic regime of watering that I use works for most of the bulbs there are always going to be a few that require slightly more or less moisture and need more individual attention. For those that like damper conditions I mark the pots with a blue label and I use a red one for those like this pot of *Narcissus* that prefer to dry out more quickly. When replanting it is not essential to sit all the bulbs the right way up - I generally place all the larger ones carefully and then scatter the smaller ones around leaving them as they fall. Because *Narcissus* are true bulbs that add layers each year they will retain the orientation that they were planted in for many years.

Colchicum montanum

Colchicum are still termed a bulb but they replace their store every year with the old one withering away. If they are planted on their side the new bulb will form with an upright orientation because the bulb is replaced completely every year. Another interesting observation to make is that the new shoot of the *colchicum* rises from the base of the bulb and grows up the side while the shoot of a true bulb like *Narcissus* still rises from the base but it passes between the scales and emerges through the top of the bulb.





Tecophilaea cyanocrocus leichtlinii

Among the pots that I will tip out and replant are the *Tecophilaea* because I have a particular interest in these beautiful plants and I love to see how they are increasing.



Tecophilaea cyanocrocus leichtlinii

When they are growing well each corm will produce at least one offset which if growing conditions were ideal can be large enough to flower next spring so ensuring a steady increase in your number of corms. This of course leads to more pots and there lies my problem- I cannot resist growing ever more in pots and increasing my annual work load beyond what I am capable of looking after properly. While I was smug about growing out of the acquisitive stage and entering the preserving and conserving stage I have not yet managed to break through to the sensible stage of only growing the amount you can properly look after. I may be stuck in this phase forever but I am at least making a token effort by planting a few spares from each pot out into the garden in the hope that many can look after themselves.



Tecophilaea cyanocrocus leichtlinii

For some reason Tecophilaea have a reputation of being difficult to grow: perhaps they have this reputation because they are generally among the more expensive bulbs to buy. It is only natural to treat expensive bulbs differently and give them special attention which in my experience often leads to not watering and feeding them enough so they dwindle or die and so add to the myth that they are difficult to grow.

My advice is to grow Tecophilaea just as you would a pot of simple-to-grow Crocus and you should succeed.

To clean the corms I rub them gently between the palms of my hands; this removes all the loose tunics and separates the offsets from the parent corms. The dried remains of last year's corm remain attached to the bottom. Whether to remove this or leave it attached is a good question but my preference is to remove it with a slight twisting motion and my reasoning is that the dried remains can absorb moisture and become infected with wet rot which can then pass on to the current season's corm.





Tecophilaea cyanocrocus leichtlinii

Here is the pot nicely replanted with the larger corms spaced out and the smaller ones in the spaces.

Part of the reason to repot these are they are one of my almost white selections of *Tecophilaea* 'Craigton Snow Drift' and this highlights another peculiarity of the specialist gardeners. Who else would want to raise a white form of a bulb that is recognised as having the finest blue of the plant world! In my defence I would just like to mention *Trillium grandiflorum* roseum!



This wonderful dwarf ***Rhododendron saluense* var *chamaeunum*** always has almost as many flowers now as it does in the spring making it one of the best. At more than twenty five years old it is still only around 30cms high but spreads out to around one metre across.



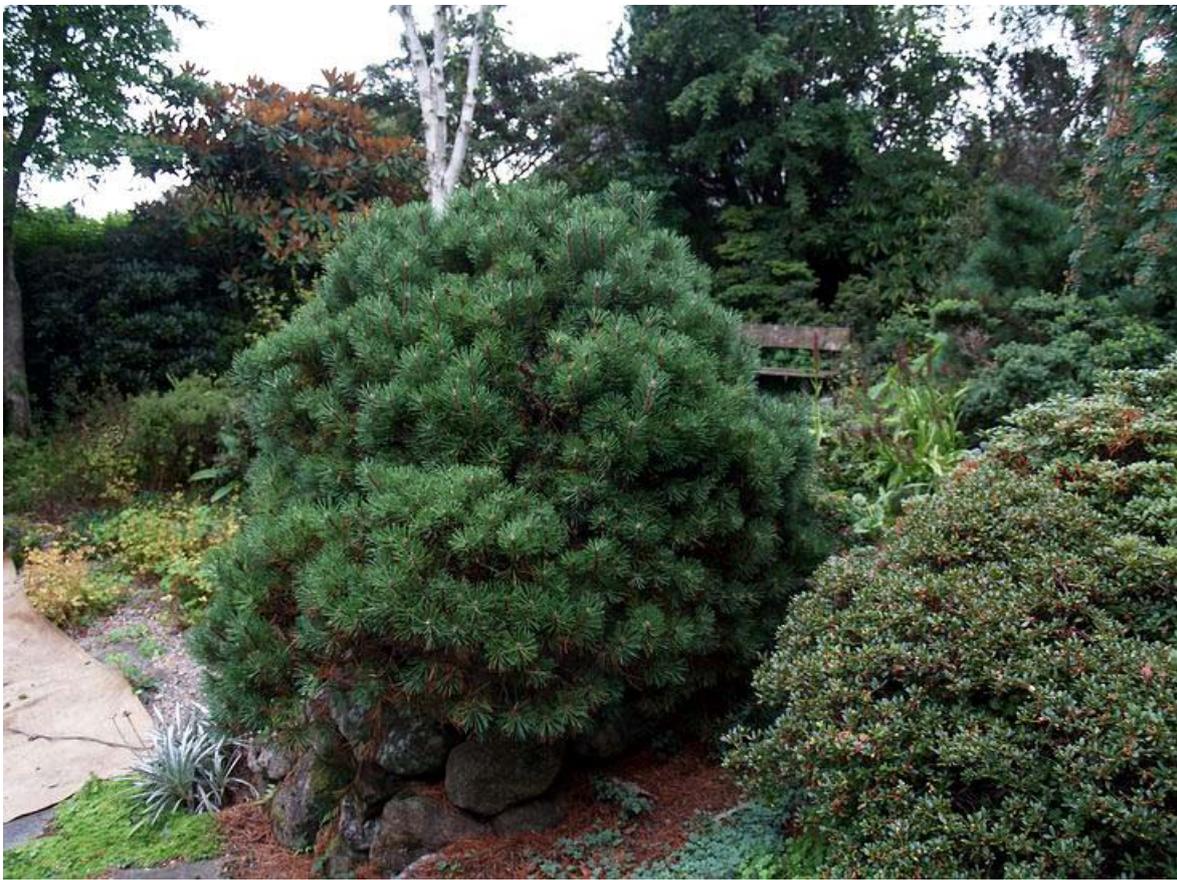
Dwarf Rhododendrons

I spoke above about how a gardener goes through a number of phases and so does a garden. When it is first planted it is a very youthful stage then it starts to grow until, if it was well laid out, it reaches your idea of perfection – unfortunately it does not stop there. Year on year the plants continue to grow into middle age then old age; just like and often simultaneously with, the gardeners – I like to think that as we started this gardening lark when we were very young that we are out of step with the garden's age. Anyhow my point is that many of the trees and shrubs in our garden have outgrown their optimum size and many are taking up more space than we would like and on top of that they are not flowering so freely as perhaps they could. The good thing is that many can be rejuvenated by a good hard prune taking them right back to almost ground level.



Dwarf Rhododendrons cut back

Before cutting them hard back it is wise to check for any signs of new growth coming from low down because not all can survive such extreme pruning. If in any doubt you can take the shrubs back by degrees over a number of years cutting one stem back per year to see how they will respond. If the subject has just got too big for the space then you do not have to worry about cutting it hard back because if it does not bud from low down it can be removed and replaced.



Pine on peat wall

Despite annual candle pruning this *Pinus montana* has spread out and is now starting to make it difficult to use some of the paths around it so it too needs some radical action.



Pine and shredder

Unlike the Rhododendrons, pines will not produce buds from old wood – they will only bud from the areas with green needles so a different approach has to be taken.

We do not want to lose the pine all together but would like to reduce its spread and at the same time recover some of the planting space around its base.

The solution is to raise the crown by removing many of the lower branches.

This not only opens up the space below but it reveals the lovely fat trunk turning a pine that looked like a bush into something that looks more like a small tree.

You can see in the foreground beside the shredder just how much i have removed and the future candle pruning will have to be even more brutal and selective.



Pruned Pine

See for yourself how it looks now – some of you will have preferred it as it was before the pruning but these are the decisions that face us when a garden reaches middle age.

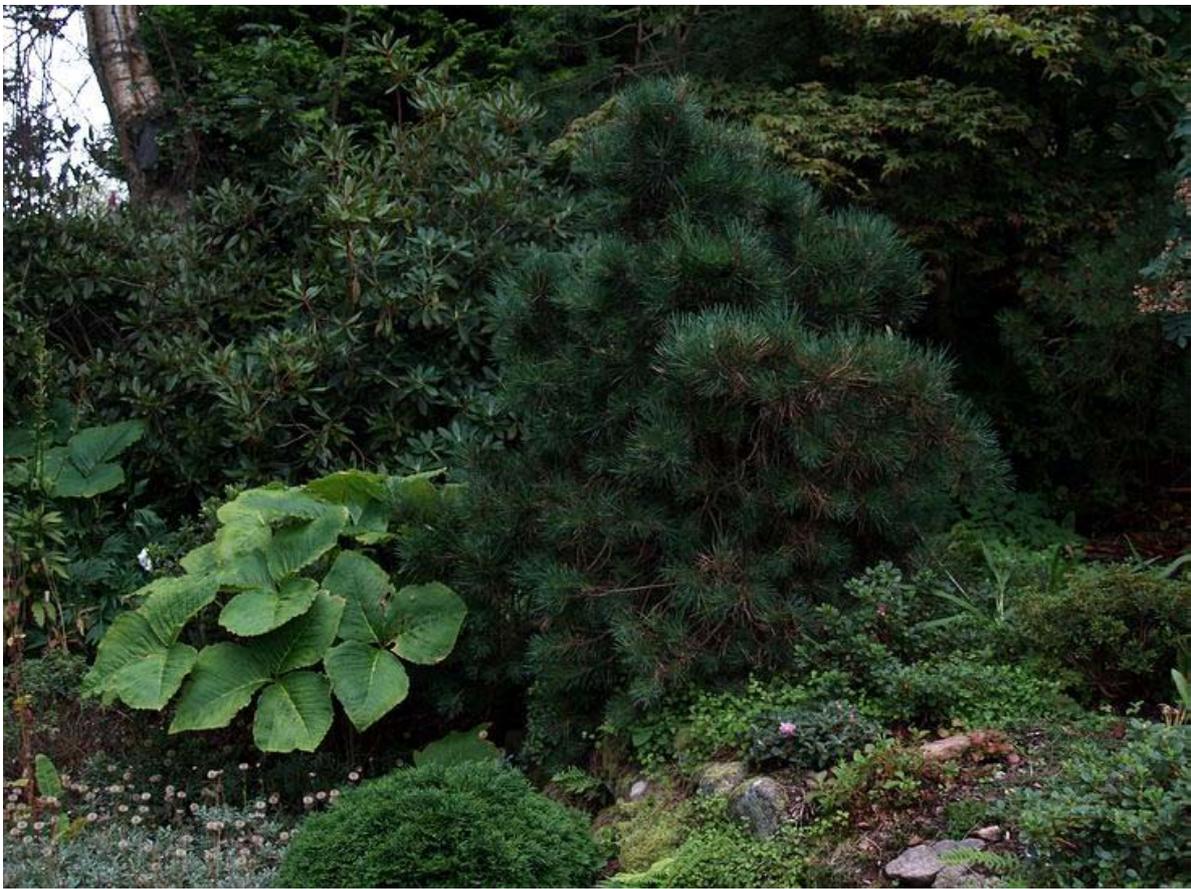


Pinus montana

The smaller pine below the wall is a true dwarf we know it as *Pinus leucodermis* 'Schmidtii' although I understand it has had a name change to *P. heldreichii*.

Is the same age as the *Pinus montana* on the wall but has never been candle pruned and has remained dwarf and compact like this for thirty years.

The space directly below the pine will be a challenge to plant up because the tree is not deciduous and so will continually block out direct overhead light but I think that a number of bulbs may grow around the edges at least. I intend to try some of the dwarf *Narcissus* such as *Narcissus rupicola* and *N. romieuxii* which should get enough moisture during the winter when they are in growth and will not mind drying out in the summer.



Pine in peat wall



There is another pine further along the peat wall that has a totally different habit of growth that I have continually candle pruned over the last thirty years.

I have also raised its crown to open up the space below for more planting.

As this one does not have such a broad dense crown as the other one I think I will get away with planting some Erythroniums and dwarf lilies below it.



Defoliated pine

Did any of you notice the brown area of defoliation on the *Pinus montana*?



Caterpillars on Pine

Here are the culprits – a caterpillar that is specific to pines and I believe cause a lot of harm in forestry plantations. For a number of years we have had a small localised infestation on two of our pines which I deal with by physically removing and destroying them. The birds do not touch them as they are full of the sticky resin from the pine needles making them very unpalatable. I wonder if a Capercaillie would eat them!?



Caterpillars on Pine

The easy way to remove them is to simply cut off the small branch that they have infested. There are two branch tips in the picture above: the lower one shows a recent hatching of very small caterpillars before they have started to do too much damage. The upper one has larger more mature caterpillars which have chewed their way through all the needles. When disturbed the caterpillars adopt the strange posture in the picture below perhaps to pretend to any potential prey that they are the stubs of pine needles– it does not fool me.

