



BULB LOG 20.....

**Oxalis laciniata 'Sandy'**

I was delighted to be able to purchase this very dark form of *Oxalis laciniata* at the Aberdeen Show on Saturday. As well as being a great form it has a great pedigree. Jim Sutherland admired a small hypertufa trough at the Ballater home of the late Alec Duguid (of Edrom Nursery fame) that was planted up with this wonderful dark oxalis: as we all would, he asked if he might have a piece. Alec suggested he take the whole trough and propagate it for his nursery, Ardfearn. It will need to have a name said Jim – call it Sandy said Alec as that is what they call me here in Ballater. The story does not stop there as Alec originally received the plant from Ruth Tweedy another mighty



name in plant circles. I planted the *Oxalis* in one of the raised beds on Sunday afternoon and applied my normal method of washing off the roots of as much compost as I could before planting it into the bed. I find that I get a much better survival rate using this brutal sounding method when planting bought in plants. The reasoning behind this technique is that the compost that the nurseryman uses is formulated to achieve good sized flowering plants as quickly as possible in order to make a living. In many cases the compost will have a high peat or peat alternative content and I have found in the past that if I just carefully tap the plant out of its pot and plant it without disturbing the roots the plant behaves as if it is still in

a pot and the roots never grow out into my much leaner compost. This often results in the plant dying of dehydration in the summer or rotting off in the wet winter months. I would not use this method much beyond the end of May as many alpine plants go into a semi dormancy during the summer months when root growth at least will be slowed right down. Towards the end of the summer, August in Aberdeen, the plants will have another active period before the onset of winter providing another opportunity to bare root and plant alpines in troughs and raised beds.



Bulb house

In the bulb house nearly everything is now retreating into summer dormancy. I stopped watering as soon as I saw any signs of the leaves yellowing or when the seed pods had expanded as my task now is to get the compost to dry out. One of the dangers of using plastic pots is that the compost can remain quite moist going into the summer as the plants no longer require it and that can cause problems with wet rots attacking the dormant bulbs. If I think the pots are too wet I have two options: one is to lift them off the sand plunge to break the link with any moisture in the plunge before placing them back and the second method is to tip off the gravel top dressing to aid the evaporation of the moisture.



Tropaeolum tricolorum and T. azureum

There are a few bulbs that will still need watering for a while yet as they are still growing on such as Tropaeolum tricolorum and T. azureum however I would advise to cut back on watering as soon as you see the leaves starting to yellow, as you can see in T. azureum leaves are in this picture.



Nothoscordum ostenii

Nothoscordum ostenii is always one of the last bulbs to flower in the bulb house and I love the way it comes up through the straw like remains of the Narcissus and Crocus leaves. I imagine this is just how it might look in its South American home coming through the parched grasses as the summer unfolds.



Calochortus uniflorus

The North American Calochortus uniflorus is another welcome flower at this time and it will need watering a for few more weeks yet and a supplementary feed of potassium as it is still in active growth.



Fritillaria recurva

It is much the same story in the Fritillaria house as most of the frits have almost completed their growth cycle and have little requirement for any additional watering. There are however always a few that grow for a bit longer and those should be carefully watered individually until you see signs of leaf yellowing indicating it is time to allow them to dry off. Fritillaria recurva has the most startling colour of all the frits

which is designed to attract humming birds to pollinate the flowers. It also produces large droplets of sweet nectar to reward the wee birds. As there is a distinct lack of humming birds in Aberdeen I do the pollinating and I also enjoy sipping the tasty droplets of nectar.



Fritillaria sororum JP 87-97

Fritillaria sororum described by Persson and Persson in 1998 from the lowland of Mt. Taurus in Anatolia – it is a close relative of *F. messanensis* but differs in having leaf tendrils



Fritillaria pyrenaica

This is one of many clumps and forms of *Fritillaria pyrenaica* that I grow in the garden where it grows much better than it does in pots.



Arisaema nepanthoides

Among my favourites and one of the earliest of the genus to flower in our garden is *Arisaema nepanthoides*.

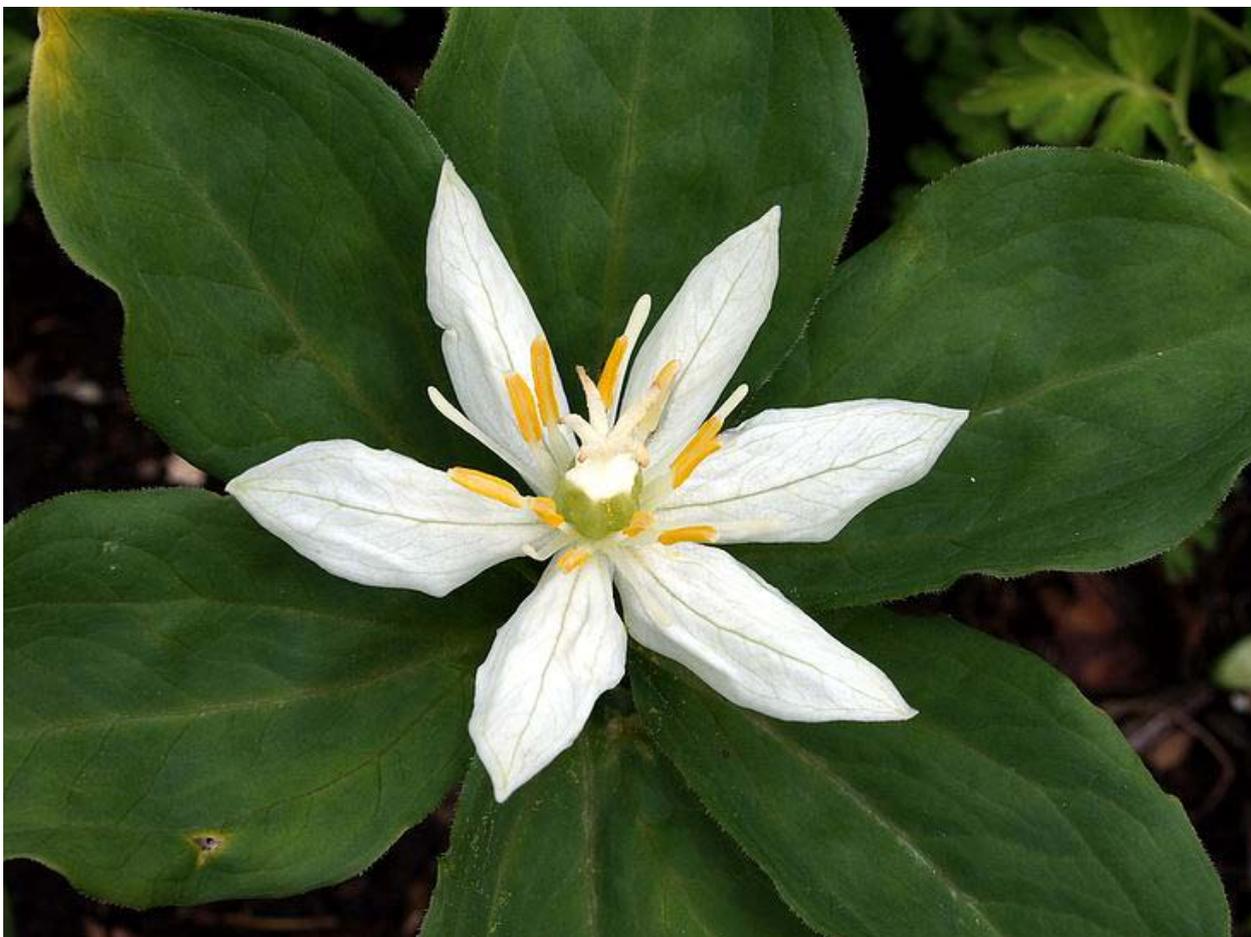
This year this plant has produced a double spathe most likely caused by some damage to the bud at a very early stage of growth. I hope that this manifestation will not recur next year. I do not expect it to.





Paris cronquistii

I have grown a number of Paris for many years now ever since they were first offered on specialist bulb lists supplied from Chinese imports. Paris cronquistii is one of the first acquired over fifteen years ago and it has not increased or grown much until this year when it seems to have taken hold and is producing a number of growths that would seem to be coming from creeping stolons or rhizomes. I suspect this sudden activity is the result of us removing a large Rhododendron last year that dominated this spot and probably denied the Paris the moisture and light it needed to grow actively.



Paris japonica

I still call this beautiful and desirable plant Paris japonica although its current name since the taxonomists split up Paris is Kinugasa japonica. Other plants that I still call Paris are now in the genus Daiswa.



Kinugasa japonica

I was recently given another plant of *Kinugasa japonica* which you can see on the left has more leaflets and I will be most interested to see it flower hopefully next year. To aid the plant to build up a reserve and flower next spring I have been giving it an occasional liquid feed of potassium rich fertiliser.



Nomocharis seedlings

Other plants requiring regular liquid feeds include these *Nomocharis* seedlings that are now in their second year of growth.

I water them every second week with a half strength tomato type fertiliser high in potassium.



Nomocharis seedlings

This detail shows that even though they are only in their second year of growth the most advanced of these Nomocharis seedlings are producing a short stem – this indicates to me that with another good season of cultivation these plants will flower next year.



Eranthis seed head

Many of the Eranthis are now ready to distribute their seeds as they enter their summer dormancy.



Eranthis pinnatifida seed heads

I mostly just let the Eranthis naturalise in the garden without collecting the seeds although I do take a handful of seeds as I walk and help to distribute the plants in other beds that I want them to colonise. However with certain species and forms I am trying to increase such as Eranthis pinnatifida above I will sow the seeds into pots.



Eranthis pinnatifida seed

It does not matter if you collect the seeds just before the capsule opens as the only difference is they will be white. They are fully matured they have just not started the drying process that oxidises the surface and turns it brown. If you look at the seeds they look just like miniature corms and this is a very good clue that it is best to sow them immediately into a humus rich compost and place them in an open seed frame. If you want to store them I do not advise putting any bulb seed into a refrigerator for at least six weeks after it is collected as I am convinced that the embryo continues to develop after the seed is shed. If you chill it down too quickly you may arrest that development and get a poorer germination when the seed is eventually sown. After six weeks there may be some advantages in storing the seed in a fridge.



Corydalis cashmeriana

One of the most beautiful blues of the plant world is found in some of the *Corydalis* and of those I think *C. cashmeriana* is outstanding. For years I have been trying to get a good seed set but despite hand pollinating have rarely managed to harvest any seeds. It may be that it is not self compatible and as all the plants that I grow have been increased vegetatively from a single clone, I will need a mate. I have tried crossing it with *C. flexuosa* and have a few pots of seedlings coming on that may be of that cross but they have not yet flowered. While it is a simple enough process it is a lot of fiddly work trying to cross pollinate these two species and it suddenly dawned on me that perhaps if I grew them closer together nature may just help out. To that end I have moved one of the troughs of *Corydalis cashmeriana* and placed it beside a clump of *C. flexuosa*.



Corydalis flexuosa* and *C. casmeriana