



BULB LOG 35.....31st August 2011



The sun has been such a rare sight in North East Scotland this summer that I decided to take a picture of it.

What a joy it was to feel the warmth on our bodies. The flowers and insects also enjoyed it and came out to play. A mass of hover flies swarmed over any flowers that were open especially some newly opened flowers on some lilies.



Glasshouses

I took good advantage of the dry weather to get the annual task of hedge cutting started and as these pictures show it was not before time.



Hedge

There is a narrow gap just wide enough for me to get down between the hedge and the glasshouses so I have to make sure that the hedge is cut well back each year so that it does not get any wider. So often I see people just trimming back and leveling off the new growth on a hedge- this will lead to problems in the future. Most hedges will put on a good 20 to 30cms of growth a year and if you allow even 5cms to stay- double that up for both sides that is 10cms per year so after ten years the hedge is a metre wider.



I cut our hedges once a year, always around late August, when I cut them as far back as I can without denuding them of all green leaves. This leaves us with a tidy hedge of reasonable width for most of the rest of the year. It is during July and August that it puts on most of its growth and looks shaggy. Of course if you like a very neat clean cut hedge you will need to cut it more than once a year.



Shredder

Nothing goes to waste as the 'crop' of hedge trimmings gets shredded and composted before being recycled as a mulch for the bulb beds. We have hedges on two sides so that is one down and one to go.



Colchicum alpinum

The fine weather did not last long and gale force winds and driving rain meant I retreated to the bulb house to continue with the other major seasonal task of repotting. I was delighted to find this lone flower in a pot of Colchicum alpinum.



Crocus corms

I am working my way through the pots on one of the plunges that had no protection last winter and I am finding lots of damage and losses. You can see above that this was a reasonable number of good sized Crocus corms for a 7cm pot.



Crocus corms

However once I cleaned them up I find they have taken a giant step backwards with only two small corms and some tiny cormlets having survived. It is the Crocus that have suffered the worst from the cold winter and I have a lot of losses and set backs.



Sternbergia bulbs

Thanks to a very generous reader of the Bulb log I received a parcel containing several lots of Sternbergia bulbs to replace some of those I lost. It is easy to become lackadaisical over the years and that is what I did. I grew more and more pots of bulbs, commandeering all the glass house space to accommodate them without adapting the plunges to suit bulbs and especially taking the precaution of adding a soil warming cable.



Propagation house

This bench with shallow aluminum trays covered with barely 1cm of sand was intended for pots of cuttings and pricked out seedlings before it became filled with pots of bulbs.



Warming cable

I do not intend to make this mistake again so I have used a soil warming cable from another area that I no longer use. When laying out these cables it is best to wire them up and switch them on for a while so that they soften and become more flexible to prevent damaging them when you bend them.



Warming cable

They can then be laid out in a looping pattern to give best coverage to the plunge and held in place by sand.



I then topped up the trays with sand to cover the cable and provide a bit more volume to hold moisture. While this is still far from the ideal plunge bed it is much better and should alleviate the worst of damage caused by freezing in the winter.



**Crocus seedlings
SRGC seed exchange
sown
February
2009**

It is always sad to lose so many bulbs and it is very easy to become dispirited but when you get nice gifts and start to work on pots of healthy seedlings I am happy again. I often ask for the mixed species packets from

the seed exchanges as part of my request. If you only list the rare and highly desirable species you may not get your full allocation but these mixed species packs do not seem to be so popular and I have discovered that they can often result in great surprises and some real treasures.



Double sowing

I have described my space saving method of sowing more than one lot of seed into the same pot previously and here is the result of one sown in January 2010.



Narcissus and Romulea

The rules are to only sow bulbs that are easily distinguishable when dormant and that require a similar growth cycle. I have decided it is time to separate these Romulea and Narcissus seedlings both of which I have now planted directly into suitable beds in the garden. This pot has been in an outside frame and you will see that the Narcissus is already starting to root.



Newt

As I move pots and seed boxes around I find some of the other creatures that inhabit our garden. I love having newts around and as they breed in our pond there are always plenty to find. At this time of year they shelter in dark moist places.



Slug

Not so welcome but enjoying the same conditions are several species of slugs.



Slug

Some of them are rather beautiful and are amazing creatures - if only they would only eat the bigger plants and weeds and leave my tiny seedlings alone.



The Colchicums in the garden are now starting to appear and I leave you with another shot of the hover flies.

