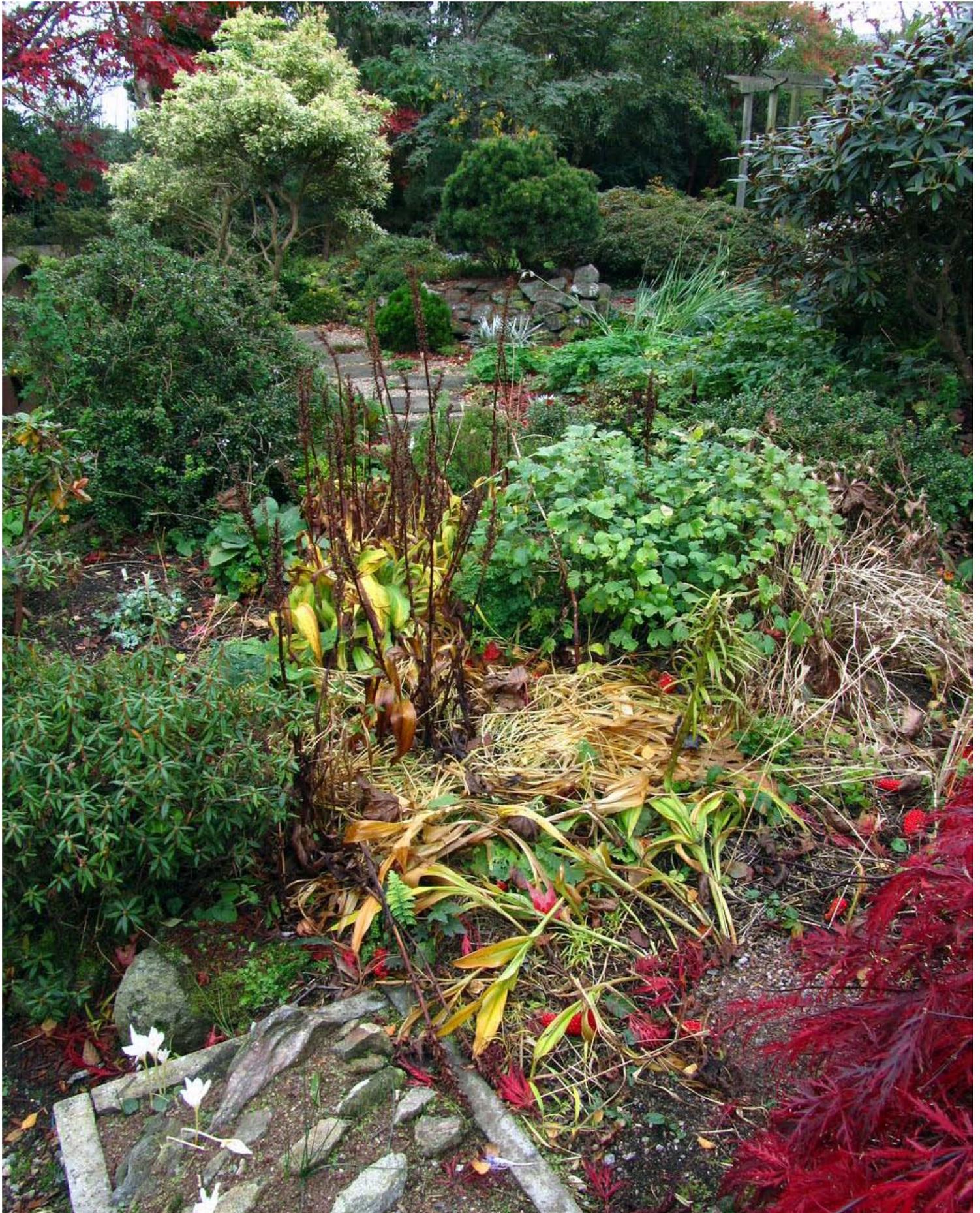




BULB LOG 43.....26<sup>th</sup> October 2011



Autumn garden

I have just come back from the deep south where I was speaking to the East Stafford group of the Hardy Plant Society and what struck me is how similar and important all our Groups, Clubs and Societies are. The enthusiasm and knowledge of these combined groups is enormous not to mention the valuable work that goes on in the individual gardens propagating and preserving such a diverse range of plants. In these times when we are seeing so many of the Specialist Nurseries closing down and the rise of the large chains of 'Garden Centres' who offer only the plants that can be mass produced, our small gardens play an enormous role in preserving the diversity of plants in cultivation. The garden centre chains like to have the same stock at the same time on all the benches throughout their network irrespective of local weather and soil conditions. They offer what they can source on that scale and provide a large enough retail margin to cover all the losses they suffer by neglect once the plants are out on display. My appeal is please support any specialist and local nurseries that actually raise most of their own stock – they should be treasured. The large scale outlets do serve a purpose but they tend to divert some of the trade away from the smaller nurseries making their survival unlikely. When I hear people complain about how the supermarkets killed off all the small specialist shops – butchers, bakers, greengrocers, etc – I answer back quickly, no it was not the giants that killed off these businesses it was the public who stopped using them, preferring the supermarket. The ultimate power is in our collective hands. If we had all continued to use the small independents then the giants would never have got the strangle hold that they have over the food business. Now I see this happening to the nursery trade I realise how vital a role our efforts play to ensure that a wide range of plants remain in cultivation. Support your local groups by getting involved – volunteer to stand for the committee, propagate plants for the plants sales, help with the seed exchanges, write for the publications, get out and give talks – getting involved is great fun as you meet people. My plea is especially to the 'younger' ones – that is anyone under 55- we need you to get involved to keep things going and meeting people in person is so much more fun than just interacting on a computer. It must be obvious that I am a big promoter of the internet and how it connects us all over the world and I would not change that for a minute – in fact I continue to drive that side of the SRGC forward but it must be in tandem with the conventional groups' activities and meetings. The forum is a wonderful place and is in my view the most active group of all as we meet all day every day to share pictures and experiences in a very diverse range of topics showing what a wide range of plants we are interested in and we are delighted to see its steady growth in membership. At the same time as we are seeing the growth of the online groups the local groups of all plant societies are seeing their numbers fall. Also the average age of those attending rises – where are the younger people? Keeping events going at regional, national and international level is vital and I am delighted to be speaking at an event in Belgium on Saturday 5<sup>th</sup> November where I will be able to meet lots of people. Organised by the Flemish Rock garden Society, VRV – information can be found on their website. [www.vrvforum.be](http://www.vrvforum.be)



**Acer leaves**



### **Autumn garden**

One of the most important considerations when laying out your garden is to get a good structure that will be there all year round and we use trees and shrubs to provide this. They divide the garden into a series of shapes that we can walk through – at no point can you see the whole garden but every so often you get a long view attracting you to walk further and explore.

### **Celmisia**

Smaller evergreen plants are also vital to give winter interest in the bulb beds and these do not have to be green. The stunning silver foliage of a Celmisia contrasts beautifully with the fiery colours of the fallen leaves plus its sculptural form will ensure it stands out and creates an impact for twelve months of the year.





**Ophiopogon planiscapus 'Nigrescens'**

At the other end of the colour scale are the black leaves of *Ophiopogon planiscapus* 'Nigrescens' which also provide interest well into the winter.



### **Gladiolus papilio**

I am not that keen on the rather untidy effect that the leaves of *Gladiolus papilio* display – at least they do not appear until late in the season and on a positive note there are not many plants whose flowers are just opening now. I do intend to move the corms further back into this bed nearer the Rhododendrons where the leaves will blend better and we can still enjoy the flowers.



**Gladiolus papilio**



Due to the cool wet summer months **Primula capitata** grows on to provide some late flowers.



### **Rhododendron ciliatum**

This picture of *Rhododendron ciliatum* exposes a few myths. First that it is not a hardy species – it has grown unprotected in our garden for twenty plus years. Second that evergreen plants do not lose leaves in autumn – the leaves of evergreen rhodos can last for a number of years but will eventually turn yellow and drop. Different species we grow retain their leaves for one, two or three years. The fact that this branch displays both a flower bud and ripe seed pods shows that it is not essential to dead head to get regular flowering – another myth? Regular dead heading will as a general rule give a better display of flowers the following spring.



### **Cardiocrinum giganteum seedpods**

I have included my hand to give you an idea of the size of the seedpods on the appropriately named *Cardiocrinum giganteum*.



Nearby the leaves on another plant of **Cardiocrinum giganteum** look large enough to suggest that this bulb will flower next year.



While many plants are losing their leaves some, like this **Corydalis 'Craigton Blue'** are just getting new leaves- these will stay all through the winter.



**Cyclamen hederifolium leaves**



The very decorative leaves of many Cyclamen also appear in the autumn and provide valuable interest in the garden through the winter while most other plants are hibernating.



A group of Cyclamen leaves, from seeds scattered in the gravel around three years ago, now display their mature form while a group of leaves appearing from seed scattered early this year can be seen in the picture below.





Further leaf forms highlight the difference in scale of the Podophyllum and Acer leaves.





Having a decorative garden does not rule out having tasty fruits such as these *Vaccinium* berries – *Vaccinium ovatum* below are especially delicious.





Gaultheria 'Pink Pearl'

Other berries include the wonderful dwarf plant Gaultheria 'Pink Pearl' which reliably produces masses of pinky white fruits every year.



The Paris seed capsule has now split to reveal a cluster of wonderful bright red berries.