

BULB LOG 29..... 18th July 2012**Dactylorhiza**

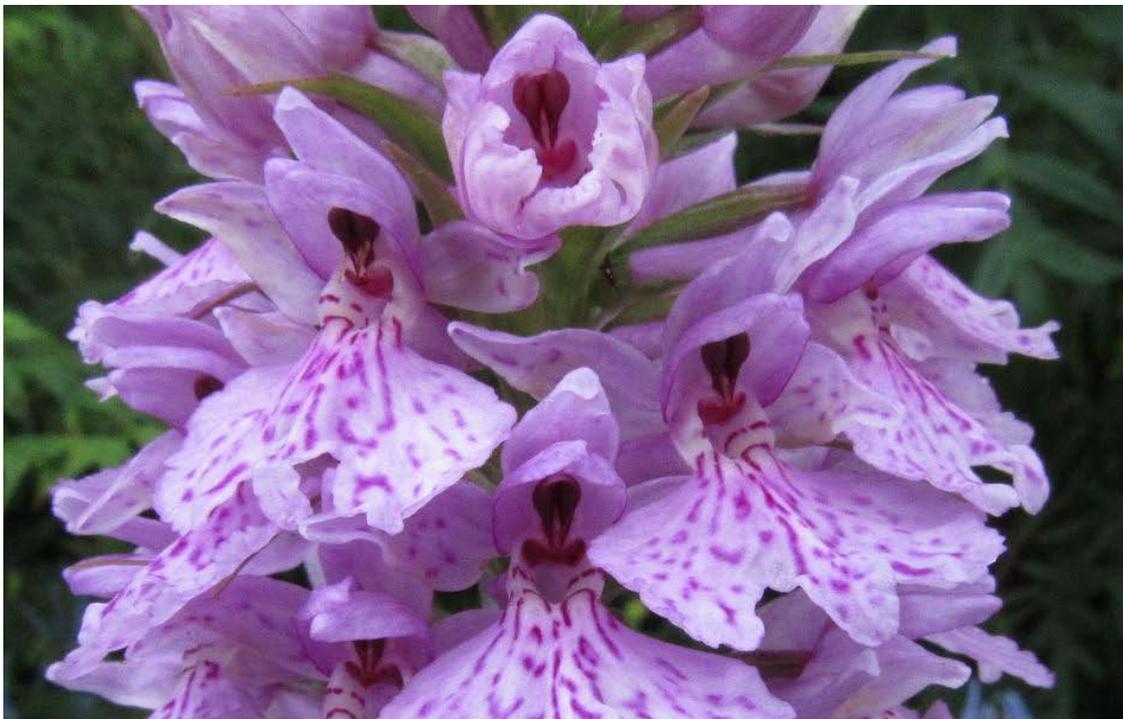
The most noticeable plants at the moment in the garden are all the various hybrid forms of *Dactylorhiza*.

All except one have arisen as self sown seedlings within our own garden and so must involve the original few *Dactylorhiza* that we introduced as plants many years ago.

These we got as *Dactylorhiza foliosa*, *elata*, and *fuchsia*, all I would say of were 'of gardens' so could themselves have been of hybrid origin. The original plants all died out from the wide spread 'black spot' diseases but the vigour of the seedlings resisted the disease and they have survived and flourished.

Evidence of the original species can be seen in both the colour and shape of the flower spike. Most of the darkest forms have roughly parallel sides and a rounded top as can be seen in the left hand flower while the paler forms tend more towards the pointed top type as seen to the right of this image.

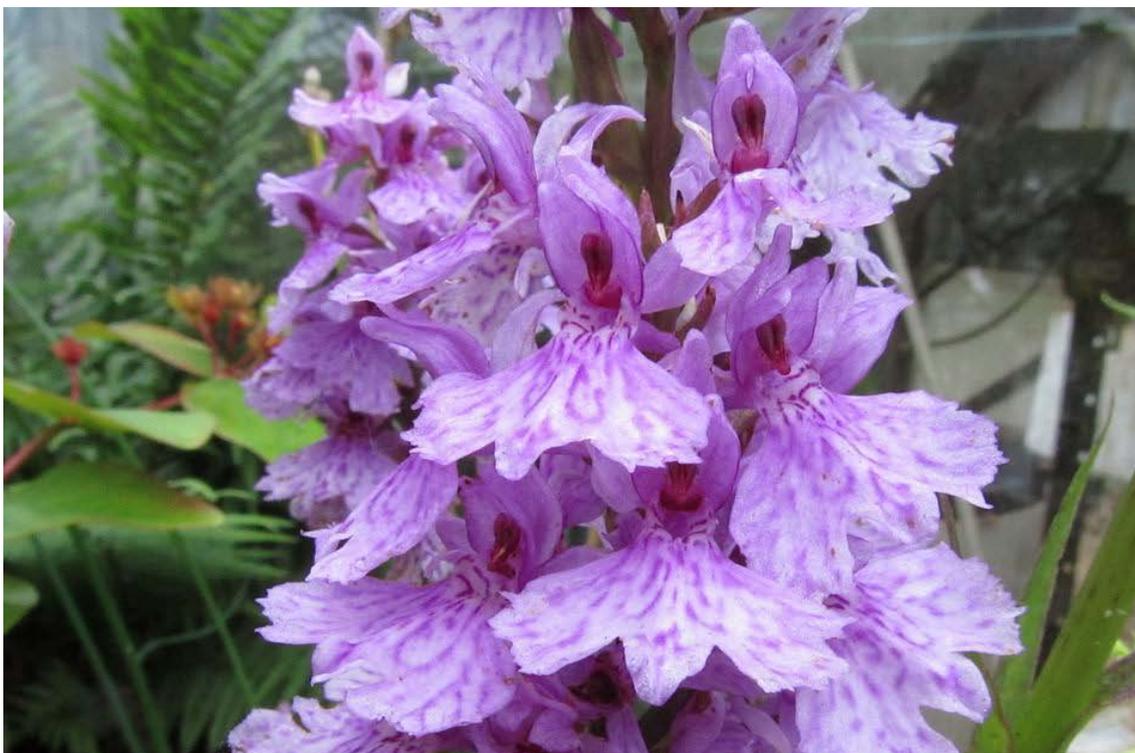
The majority of these cultivars are fertile producing viable seed which results in the many new seedlings we still find each season.



Dactylorhiza

Close examination of the flowers spikes show that each has a slightly differing colour which may not be noticed on a casual look.

When you delve even more closely and look at the individual flowers on a spike you will see that the pattern of markings on each flower is not cloned but a variant.



And of course the shape of the flowers also varies. Particularly important to identification is the shape of the lower petal.

I must admit I do not spend hours analysing them to try and discover their ancestral origin rather I spend my time enjoying their complex beauty.



Some have plain green leaves, as in the clump in the foreground above, while others have varying degrees of brown spotting like those seen below.





I have always allowed them to clump up - even when I lift and split them on a regular basis to speed up the rate of increase. I have tended to plant them back in clonal groups like here with the white *Dactylorhiza* 'Eskimo Nell' contrasting with a typical garden hybrid.



Now I am starting to plant them in mixed groups where I can enjoy the subtle variations of colour mixing the white, pale and dark pinks into groups.



You can better appreciate the subtle variation in colour when the spikes are sitting side by side like this.



I much prefer this style of planting but it will require lifting and dividing every two or three years to prevent individual clumps forming. It will be interesting to see just how this group develops over the next few years.



Even the same garden looks different every year as local weather conditions vary and some plants grow better than others but this year I will remember as the year that summer forgot - that difference is even more noticeable. The foliage growth has been enormous due to all the rain and many plants are substantially bigger than in previous years which has given some of our already very densely planted beds an extremely overgrown feeling.



Most years at this time it is the *Roscoeia* that are the feature of this bed but this year they are totally surrounded by the substantial leafy growth of *Dactylorhiza* and *Arisaema* (and with *Galium* weeds!) which are enjoying an extended wet season.



Such a shame that one of my favourite plants of all time, *Roscoea humeana alba* cannot be seen unless you part the foliage of its neighbours to see below, likewise *Roscoea purpurea* below. I will have to consider moving these plants to a more open spot if this type of weather is to become more common.





Narcissus bulbs

The long wet periods have kept me out of the garden but does mean that I am now well on with the re-potting of the bulbs with only the Fritillaria house to go. One of the reasons that annual repotting is the ideal is it allows me to check the health of the bulbs and see how they have fared in the past season and quickly deal with any problems. This pot of Narcissus perez chiscano has grown well and all but one of the bulbs are healthy. Any bulbs that are not firm to the touch need closer investigation.



Narcissus bulb

I wanted to see what had caused this one bulb to be slightly soft to the touch and all was revealed when I cut it in two to view the section. It could be a form of rot that spread from an infected basil plate but the nature of the tunnelling and the dross suggests to me that this is the result of the dreaded Narcissus fly grub feeding on the centre of the bulb. Fortunately this has been a rare occurrence in our garden and I have not seen it much in the potted narcissus at all. It could be that as this is one of the broader leaved species that I grow in pots it offers more of an attraction to the pest than the very narrow leaved species.



Narcissus bulbs splitting

These are healthy bulbs splitting naturally as they have had a good season of growth. If you find that your bulbs have split into lots of small bulbs and there are no flowering sized ones then that is a sure sign that the plant suffered stress during its growth cycle. The most common problem is lack of water at the two critical times of growth namely the first period of active root growth in early September as the roots are just emerging and the second when the flower spike and leaves are extending, which is supported by a second phase of root extension. The plants need copious quantities of water delivered at those phases of growth to encourage and fuel good growth.



Narcissus wilkommii bulbs

The contents of another pot of good sized bulbs - the typically 'bulbous' shape tells me that the majority of them should flower next spring.



Narcissus jonquilla bulbs

By observing your bulbs you will learn so much - like these *Narcissus jonquilla* bulbs show. First the bottom row of typically 'bulb' shaped bulbs is what we want to see and indicate that we got the growing conditions pretty well correct. The elongated ones in the upper row teach us two things; firstly, the elongated shape of the bulbs indicates that they were not planted deep enough and are trying to take themselves down. The reason for this is my habit when I am plant a pot full of bulbs and still have a few small offsets left I scatter just enough potting mix to cover the planted bulbs then scatter the bulbils on before filling the pot up with mix so they were not as deep as the other bulbs.



The second thing we can learn is that the bulbils fell on their sides and have started to turn themselves so they are correctly oriented in an upright position in the soil – clever things. *Narcissus* are true bulbs that are perennial and get larger each year unlike say *Fritillaria* bulbs which completely replace themselves annually.



Rhodohypoxis baurii

The empty spaces in the trough above are the result of mice eating the corms during last winter luckily I managed to neutralise this problem before they devastated all the troughs.





I was speaking of my love for mixing the differing colours of plants by planting them in mixed groups and not clonally and here is another example. Above is a clonal trough of *Rhodohypoxis baurii* 'Fred Broome' and below is a mixture of seedlings – I know which one I prefer.

