



BULB LOG 22.....30th May 2012

Many of you dear readers who live in areas that have a continental type climate must wonder why we in Scotland keep going on about the weather all the time: it is because it is so changeable - last week had sunshine, rain, sleet, hail, snow, frost and wind and that was just in one morning. The weather changes that fast and despite the best efforts of the forecasters we never really know for sure what we will get. If you add into the equation the many very different areas in Scotland each with factors that affect the local weather then I hope you can understand our fixation. The weather is of even more concern when you are a gardener as it has dramatic effects on the growth of the plants. This spring we have seen some plants flower early, some late and some never managed to open the flower buds fully because of the constant cold and wet. Some time ago I predicted that due to this poor weather this would not be a good year for seed on the bulbs and I can now confirm that is the case.

Having had a most miserable period of almost constant cloud rain and cold, this last week has been the most glorious seven days of warm sunshine and temperatures into the low 20C I can remember. Of course now after a week of this I am worrying about the plants suffering from a shortage of water. One of the most commonly asked questions when I give talks about the garden is 'what is your rainfall?' I immediately turn the question around pointing out that the more critical factor is what your evaporation rate is. Normally having endured such a long wet period there would have been plenty moisture in the ground to last the plants for weeks if not months but after a week of such hot sunny weather much of the moisture will have been used up by the plants, pumped out of the ground as their transpiration rate increases or evaporated directly away from the soil surface in the warm sunshine.



Tropaeolum azureum

The *Tropaeolum azureum* running wild in the Fritillaria house has certainly enjoyed the sunshine producing a massive flush of blooms.



Ornithogalum sp. Greece

Most of the bulbs under glass have responded to the heat and retreated underground but a few late bloomers, such as this lovely wee Ornithogalum sp. from Greece, are still flowering.



Ornithogalum sp. Greece

We are all sometimes guilty of just dismissing these as just another white Ornithogalum but as with all things in life the more you look the more you will see and these delightful flowers will reward you for closer scrutiny. I love the shiny yellow seed capsule with its short stubby style and the broad based filaments that almost form a tube in the throat of the flower. Another quite different taller species, below, actually has a second set of floral segments that form a narrow tube around the filaments with just the anther protruding, offering up the pollen.



Ornithogalum sp. Greece



Calochortus uniflorus



Calochortus uniflorus

Calochortus uniflorus is the only species of this beautiful genus that I have succeeded with for any length of time.

I love the way the fresh growth responds to the heat - rising towards the sunlight through the yellowing leaves of Crocus, Narcissus, etc as they are in retreat.

As with all plants raising from seed will give you variability as you can see from the three differently marked flowers I show.





Calochortus uniflorus



Crocus mathewii corms

It is incredible how long moisture can be retained in the potting medium when there is no active plant growth taking it up – this is especially so when using plastic pots. I have in past years tipped off the gravel top dressing from some pots as the plants go dormant to speed up the evaporation and hence drying out but I have discovered to my cost that certain bulbs that like a dry dormancy can sit too wet immediately after going dormant and that has caused me to lose bulbs to wet rot - Crocus mathewii is one of those species.



Crocus mathewii corms

Crocus mathewii corms have evolved in a region where the ground must get very dry so their corm tunics hold onto moisture like a sponge. In the wild or in hot dry conditions this is fine but in our cool moist growing conditions this retained wetness causes the remains of the old corm at the base to rot which then spreads and kills the new corm. To prevent these losses I now tip out the corms as soon as the leaves die back, remove the outer loose corm tunics, spread out the compost to dry before returning the corms to their underground rest.



Crocus mathewii corms

This is another clone of Crocus mathewii and it shows the stage of leaf growth when I am happy to tip the corms out to dry off.

The picture below shows the corms have grown a good sized second corm as well as having developed fat contractile roots indicating to me that they would prefer to be planted deeper than they were previously.



Crocus mathewii corms with contractile roots



Crocus laevigatus corms

These *Crocus laevigatus* corms illustrate another problem growers often come across when the plant's growth cycle has been cut short for some reason. On the right is good growth where the old corm remains only as a slim shell at the base of the new corm. The one on the left shows that the old corm is still around half the size of the new one and has not been able to pass on all its unused reserves - this is often caused by sudden high temperatures and/or drying out. I always remove the old corm as at this stage of dormancy it can no longer pass over that reserve.



Crocus niveus corms

Ideally I would like to leave all my bulbs to dry out and rest over the summer before re-potting them at the end of August, ready for the September storm, but with the number of pots we have that is not possible so I have to start

early.

This is a good example of how many bulbs you can grow successfully in even a seven centimetre pot.

These young *Crocus niveus* corms certainly don't seem to have minded being crowded together but I have not put them all back in this time.

Because of the smaller volume of compost there is less problems with these pots sitting too wet at this time of year but on the other hand they need watered more often than the 11 cm ones do





Narcissus graellsii bulbs

This is a really nice form of *Narcissus graellsii* that a friend gave me last year and as my aim when I get given a bulb is to try and get seed on it - in this case I have been successful. My success is down to a few factors one that I transferred pollen over a number of days when it was ripe and more critically this plant was flowering during one of the warmer parts of the early spring when temperatures were conducive to active pollen growth and fertilisation.



Narcissus graellsii bulbs

I now have three reasonable sized bulbs and a nice quantity of seed. I could store the seed in dry sand over the summer and sow it in August but because there is still plenty of space even in this 7cm pot I am going to sow it back in with the parent bulbs. Because it does not require a second pot this is a space saving method I often use.



Narcissus graellsii bulbs

I place some dry compost in to around 1/3 of the way up the pot then place the bulbs, see above, now I add just enough compost to hold the bulbs and cover them almost to their tops then I add the seeds, see below.



The seeds are now sown deep around half way down in the pot before I fill it with dry compost and return it to the plunge for the summer. It will get its first watering at the beginning of September.



Dactylorhiza seedlings

I am in the habit of scattering our Dactylorhiza seeds around the troughs and here you can see the results as a number of seedlings emerge through the rosettes of this silver encrusted saxifrage.



I only planted this trough in October 2009 so at most these seedlings can only have germinated in Early 2010. I am amazed to see that one now has a flower bud – who would have thought that they could grow to maturity so quickly. This is one of my cement covered fish box troughs landscaped with broken slabs of cement.



I am returning to two blue corydalis that I have already shown you but cannot resist sharing them some more. The gorgeous **Corydalis pseudobarbisejala** above is now really in full flower.



I first showed a picture of this **Corydalis flexuosa** well into flower in April and it just gets better.....