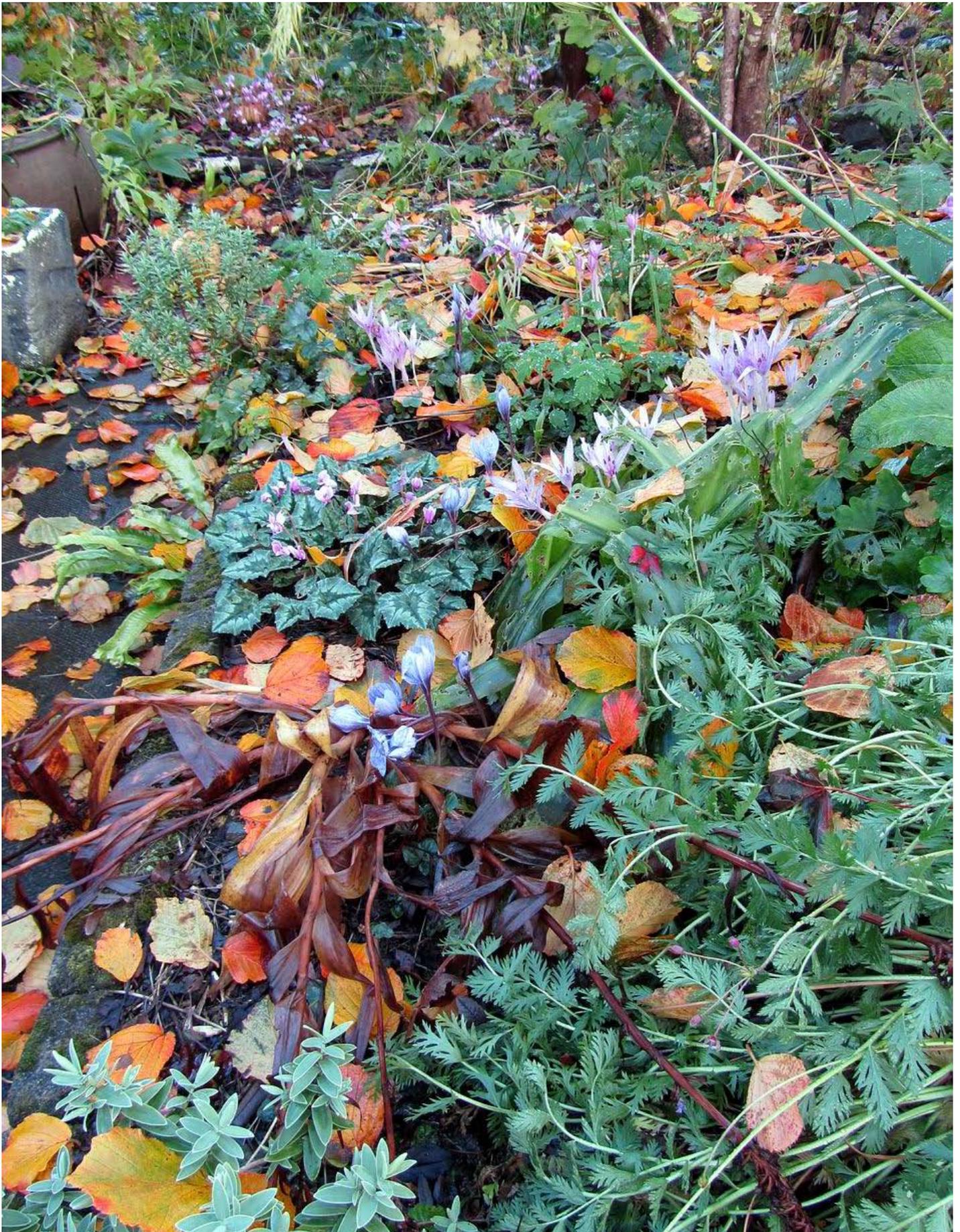




BULB LOG 43..... 24th October 2012



Autumn colour bulb bed



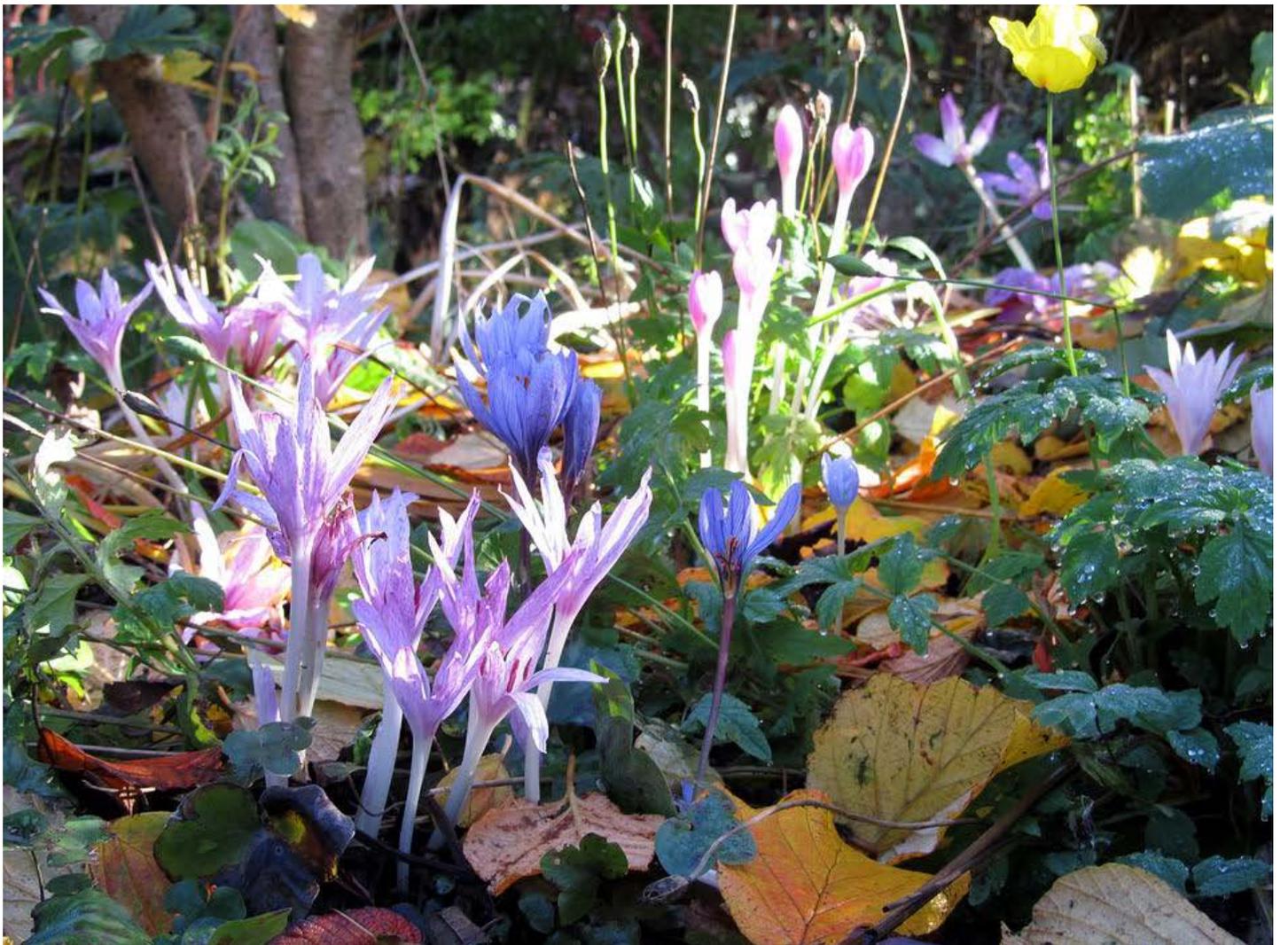
Crocus speciosus

There is something joyous about autumn in the garden with the juxtaposition of the new flowers emerging from autumn flowering bulbs pushing upwards through the decaying old leaves of plants that are retreating underground in preparation for the oncoming winter. You do not need a lot of space to enjoy this seasonal colour –the next



sequence of pictures are all taken in a relatively small area at one edge of the bulb bed.

This is the area I reworked a few years back with the aim of trying to get flowering interest for as many weeks of the year as I could, using primarily but not exclusively, bulbs. Early in the year it was Galanthus, Eranthis and Crocus that dominated now Crocus are again featured along with Colchicum and Cyclamen.





Colchicum agrippinum

The hot colours of fallen Hamamelis leaves provide the perfect contrast and background to the tessellated flowers of Colchicum agrippinum.



I accept the slug chewed leaves as a fact of life and I think, due to the cool moist summer, many of us have suffered more than most years from the massive explosion in the population of slugs and snails.



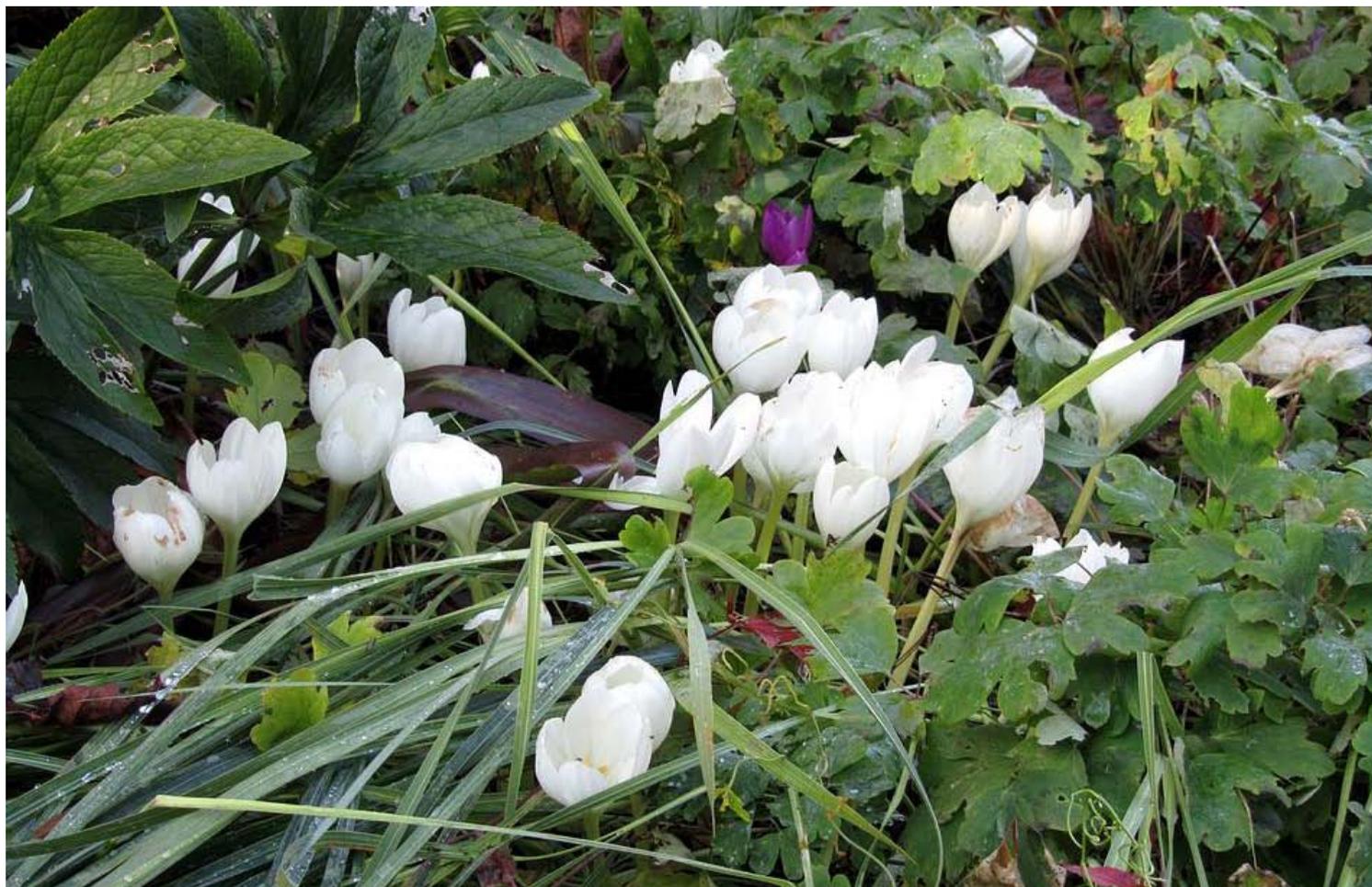
Moving around the garden, *Colchicum speciosum album* flowers in the deep shade planted right at the base of a large *Acer* where not many plants would thrive.



Also in deep shade more *Colchicum* flowers push their way through the leaves of a sprawling *Asarum*.



The leaves of Colchicums are so often given as a reason for not growing them, I remember standing in a garden full of Hosta being told by the owner that they would not grow Colchicums because they had big leaves!! I suspect it is the fact that the flowers come now and the leaves wait until spring that puts these people off .As long as you take into account that leaves will appear and plant accordingly no garden should be without a few of these highly decorative bulbs. **Above and below: two colour forms of Colchicum speciosum.**





Crocus banaticus slowly clumps up in our garden while **Crocus vallicola** below remains as a single corm and if I want a group I have to raise them from seed and plant them together.





Crocus hadriaticus

Moving on into the bulb houses more Crocus are now appearing - encouraged to open their flowers by the mild conditions we enjoy occasionally when the wind comes from the south, pushing the warm air up from Africa.



Crocus in the Bulb House

I was starting to get concerned that this might be a poor season for Crocus flowers but now, some three weeks later than other years, many more are appearing. Look carefully at the pot in the foreground and you should be able to see that the gravel top dressing has been heaved up way above the rim of the pot by the mass of growth going on below. A half dozen flower shoots have already broken the surface and I hope to see many more soon.



Compare the perfect first flower from a pot of **Crocus mathewii** in the bulb house with the chewed and weather beaten **Crocus speciosus** flowers in the open garden below and you can clearly see the advantage of growing under glass. Despite the fact that I stand a better chance of protecting the plants from the slugs under glass I would not choose to be without a garden full of them - it is of course best to have both.





Crocus pulchellus and Crocus kotschyanus

The glasshouse makes it much more pleasant for me to enjoy the bulbs under sheltered conditions. The other benefit of growing under glass is that the extra heat and protection opens the flowers which in turn attract the pollinating insects. Below you will see the grains of white pollen on the stigmatic surface showing that this fly has done the job of fertilising the flower and the few degrees of added warmth provided by the glass protection will also help the pollen grow down the tube and increase my chance of getting a good seed set.





With so many species close together open pollination will result in hybrids like this white one above. While I had it labelled as *Crocus pulchellus albus* I suspect that it is not the true species.



Galanthus nivalis* subsp *reginae olgae

A tiny form of *Galanthus nivalis* subsp *reginae olgae* flowers at the edge of a 7cm pot – the flower stem is barely 7cm high.

I suspect the small size is not a genetic trait and I could feed this plant up to produce bigger flowers. The autumn flowering snow drops have not proved hardy outside in our garden but we have a number of forms that we grow in pots – although I am not sure that I should be admitting to that ☺.





As well as enjoying the flowers as they open in the bulb houses I need to be vigilant in removing their remains as they go over. Those innocent looking dried out flowers lying on the gravel surface will quickly attract moulds in cold wet conditions and this can spread to the growing parts of the plant such as the leaves which are already showing as green tips emerging from the shoots.



Narcissus leaves

The other main task is to keep an eye on the moisture levels to ensure that pots with active leaf growth, like many of the Narcissus, do not dry out completely. Deciding when it is time to add more water comes from experience but it is better to let them almost dry out then flood them than it is to trickle in small amounts of water.



If you do not have an area of autumn bulbs to contrast with the fiery leaves now is the time to start planning where you are going to create it.....