



BULB LOG 327th August 2013



Colchicum species



The very first bulb to flower in my newly refurbished bulb house plunge is this lovely white Colchicum. I raised it from seed collected by a friend who thought they were collecting Colchicum szovitsii - obviously it is not that spring flowering species but something quite other –I would be grateful for any suggestions to its ID.

Being so pleased with our new look bulb house plunging I have ordered an 8foot run of the same staging to replace the old mist plunge down one side of the propagation house. You can see that I have the old plunge cut away and am waiting for the delivery of the new. At the far

end of the picture is the plunge that I planted bulbs directly into the sand – I have used some of the edging from the old bulb house plunge increasing the height of the edge which allows me to make the sand deeper. I will continue to plant bulbs directly into the sand plunge in this extension.



'Flan' trough



with compost or sand but to pile it up as high as I can. The most common mistake people make when landscaping their troughs is not to take the opportunity to create height – in my opinion most of your rock work should sit above the edge of the trough.

When I was preparing the bases to support the legs of the plunge I had a wee bit of cement mix left over so I made one of my 'flan' troughs. I have shown the established ones a number of times before but I did not have a picture of the unplanted troughs. They are very easy to make: I simply mould the cement mix on flat board like you would make a flan base from pastry and poke a couple of holes in the base while the cement is wet to allow for drainage.

My method of landscaping troughs of any size is not just to fill them



Make it so that it looks interesting before you add any plants and then use plants to further enhance the effect. When I landscape a trough I usually leave it for a while until I am satisfied with the effect only then will I add the plants. There may not look like there are many planting opportunities in this small trough but there are more cracks and fissures than you realise and the plants, when I add them, will highlight these. Here I am using my current favourite 'rock' – broken concrete block.



Crocus scharojanii

The first Crocus of the new season to flower is the beautiful deep yellow *Crocus scharojanii*. It is not the easiest of bulbs we grow which is reflected by its rarity in cultivation. Tantalisingly I have seen pictures of carpets of it growing in its native habitat where it enjoys snow cover and cool moist conditions for much of the year. We do not manage to flower it every year but with perseverance have been getting better results with some flowers appearing most years - usually at the end of July. We have three pots of seed raised plants but only a few corms in each and they all manage to flower at different times so I have not ever had seed from the garden – I live in hope.

I like to tell people that there is only one month of the year that we do not have a Crocus in flower and that month is June. *Crocus scardicus* is the last of the season flowering in May and *Crocus scharojanii* the first of the new season in July – for most of the other months there are a number of species in flower with the long flowering season of *Crocus laevigatus* taking us through the winter months.





Cyananthus lobatus



Cyananthus lobatus dominates one end of this raised bed trailing down the edge and would touch the ground were it not for the troughs below. It is a beautiful plant that flowers over quite a long period and it is lovely to watch the bees visiting each flower in turn.



Cyananthus lobatus



Cyananthus microphyllus

We also grow *Cyananthus microphyllus* in the same bed – the effect is very similar with the second species being slightly smaller in size and coming into flower some three weeks later.



Hypericum reptans

Another trailing plant, *Hypericum reptans*, also from the Himalaya, dominates the other end of the same raised bed.



It flowers profusely covering itself with beautiful large yellow blooms from July until the frosts set in. It too attracts the bees which I am pleased to say we are seeing much more of this year and their attentions ensure plenty of seed is set.



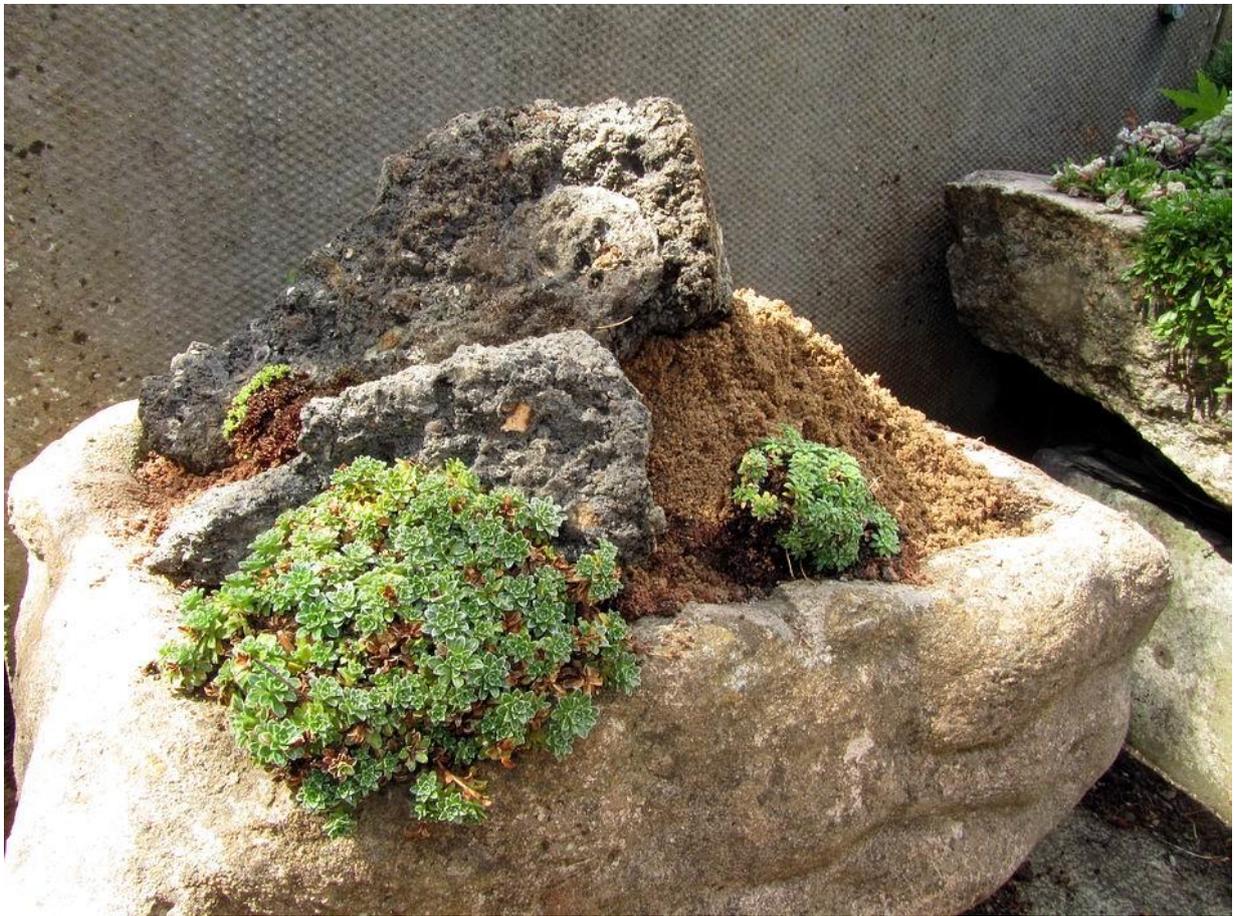
I have been unhappy with this trough for a number of years. I was never satisfied with the landscaping but had made the best use of the material, small bits of sand stone, that I had to hand at the time of making it. Also a number of the saxifrages that I had originally planted had not done well - with some dying out altogether.



So I pulled it apart to re-landscape it leaving the best of the saxifrages in situ.



Remember my first rule of trough landscaping – make a pile of compost which in my case is just sharp sand.



Then using my preferred rock – broken concrete block- which I can get a plentiful supply of - I start to create a high landscape with plenty of planting opportunities.



I usually prefer to landscape the trough then plant it up later with small cuttings or even by scattering seed but on this occasion I had to work around the few established saxifrages that I had left where they were and a few more that I had removed while deconstructing the old landscape were planted as I went on.



To disguise the fact that I am using broken concrete blocks and make it look like a natural material I try and avoid leaving one of the square surfaces showing. They can be very useful butted together forming deep crevices ideal for planting into.

After a short while I am very satisfied with my re-worked trough - it is certainly much more pleasing to my eye even though I am using concrete and not sandstone as in its previous incarnation.

A good soaking with water helps wash the sand down into all the cracks and beds in the plants.





A well landscaped trough should offer a number of different aspects for plants. I have placed the ones that like sun on this South East face.



The North face is steep and ideal for the saxifrages that burn easily if they get too much direct sunshine.



Just like a mountain the same face changes look as you view it from a different angle. This is the same side as shown two pictures above but looking from the North East.



It is very quick and easy to do a makeover on a small trough how I wish it was as easy in the front garden where we are undertaking stage one of a major overhaul. After thirty five years we finally decided that the front had reached the stage where none of the plants were being seen to their best so I got the help of a friend, David Atkinson, who runs a landscaping business, to cut down and remove this *Pinus strobus* along with some of the bigger dwarf *Rhododendrons* that had outgrown their space and were not flowering very well.



We then carried on removing many of the other shrubs such as *Vacciniums* and *Gaultherias* that we have enjoyed over the years but now need to go. I describe gardening as a journey and not a destination; you cannot say that this is how I like it and stop the clock. The plants continue to grow and while you can prune and trim them for so long to extend your ideal you cannot keep the plants frozen in time.



We cut down and shredded all the cuttings to return them eventually to the ground as a mulch.



The heap of shredding heap got bigger as the prunings disappeared and now we have a large planting space. To be continued.....



The last picture this week is of *Cyclamen purpurascens* - my favourite of those that grow in our open garden.....