



BULB LOG 07.....13th February 2013



Narcissus

After a long wait we are now starting to see the early Narcissus coming into bloom in the bulb houses and what a pleasure they are bringing with all their variation but first a quick look at what is coming into flower in the garden .



The very first *Corydalis solida* form is flowering, well ahead of its kin, under the shelter of a large *Rhododendron decorum*.



Galanthus

The snow drops are also starting to emerge with some in full bud ready to flower if only the sun would come out and push the temperature up a bit.

Coming so early in the season we are most familiar seeing *Galanthus* clumps pushing through the bare ground and the challenge for me is to find a foliage plant that would complement the clumps of snowdrops and grow in harmony with them.

As with so many of the best plant associations in our garden this combination has appeared spontaneously as this clump of *Corydalis flexuosa* has gradually extended its territory over the area where several other bulbous plants, including this *Galanthus*, are growing. Followers of the bulb log will know my aim in our garden is to establish carpets of plants, mainly bulbous, to cover the ground providing as near a continuously changing palette of colour and texture as the season progresses. I am often asked how I work out which plants will grow well together and the answer is simple, observation just like this.



Galanthus

‘Elizabeth Harrison’

This is one bulb you are not likely to see on a sales table at the snowdrop galas down south for a few years yet.

One bulb of ‘Elizabeth Harrison’ set a world record price on Ebay last year when it went for £725.10 resulting in masses of publicity across all the media.

Is it crazy to pay such a sum for a single bulb? It could only reach that figure if two people were competing in the auction and as I remember six bidders were still going at over £600 – that is what can happen at auction.

Why *Galanthus* bulbs are more expensive than most other bulbs is not so easy to answer except that price

is market driven in that there are plenty of people queuing up at the sales tables fired on by an enormous enthusiasm to be acquire the latest variation to be added to an already too long and still growing list of cultivars. Is this wrong? Not in my eyes, I am just delighted by anything that encourages people to get out in the cold looking at bulbs even if they are just trying to spot the difference. As to all the thousands of cultivars time, will sort them out – in ten or twenty year’s time many will only survive as a historical record in the lists published in books - the very best will stand the test of time and take their place alongside the likes of *Galanthus* ‘Sam Arnot’ or ‘Magnet’ that in many ways still set the standard of what makes a good garden snowdrop after m any years in cultivation.



Crocus abantensis

In a raised bed the buds of *Crocus abantensis* have appeared – they are always among the first of the Crocus to open in the garden – they too await some sunshine before they reveal their true beauty.



In the bulb house the sun has occasionally come out enough to increase the temperature, magnified inside the small volume of air enclosed by glass, causing a surge in growth from a number of Crocus.



Crocus biflorus raised from wild collected seed flowering here for the first time.



Crocus, still to be identified, from collected seed – showing typical variation you will get in seed raised plants.



Crocus civijjii



One day it was warm enough to fully open these *Crocus laevigatus* flowers which also filled the glasshouse with a delicious scent.



Narcissus and Iris



It is not just the Crocus that are patiently waiting some spring heat above you can see a form of *Narcissus bulbocodium* and *Iris histrio* both now opening their first flowers.

To show the variation in size of these *Narcissus* flowers, something that is not always appreciated if you cannot see them side by side, I have carefully bent across a *Narcissus romieuxii* flower to illustrate just how small this *Narcissus bulbocodium* actually is.



Narcissus 'Craigton Clumper'

Narcissus 'Craigton Clanger'

How can I be critical about all the named snowdrops when I have named a number of Narcissus that have apparently little variation.

My naming policy is simple. I compulsively raise bulbs from seed selecting those that stand out for some reason. Sometimes it is the vigour of increase and/or the willingness to flower freely rather than a strong variation in colour or form that leads to a plant being selected.

It is when I have a surplus and am going to

pass a plant around that I give it a name – if I don't there is a danger that over the years it gets passed around and eventually may end up with several people giving the same plant a different name. I always add 'Craigton' to the start of the name to make it easy to identify the origin of these cultivars. Many will disappear as they fail to stand the test of time but I do hope that a few will stick around for many years.





A form of *Narcissus romieuxii* JCA 805 whose flowers face directly upwards when the first open before they gradually turn on their sides.



Narcissus 'Hat' with a lobed corona. The late Kath Dryden gave me this bulb.



This is the hybrid that I want to name 'Joan Stead' but only after I can confirm that the deep lobbing is a stable feature and that I have it fully cloned out from other similar seedlings.



The last three pictures for this week are three seedlings involving *Narcissus romieuxii* all of which were self sown strays that grew in the sand plunge and I am now growing them on for appraisal.



The last two pictures shows the colour variation of these flowers from a good yellow to pure white