



BULB LOG 22.....29th May 2013



I am continually fascinated by the variable seasons in the garden and how our changeable weather brings slightly different plant combinations every year. Of course the *Arisaema nepentroides* and *Trillium grandiflorum* always come up to flower through the under planting of *Dicentra* but the precise state of growth of each plant varies as they each respond in their own way to the changeable weather. We use other plants such as the low growing *Anemone x seemanii*, seen on the right, to form under-plantings for some of the smaller bulbs and in many beds these under- plantings take over after the early plants such as *Corydalis solida*, *Eranthis*, *Crocus* and *Galanthus* have finished flowering.





Glaucidium palmatum album



Glaucidium palmatum

We commonly read that woodland type plants should be planted in shade and looking at many of them we can work out why. Their large leaves have evolved to harvest the dappled light that filters through the tree canopy and so could easily be scorched if placed out in full sun. However as far as I am concerned Scotland is in shade and we rarely if ever get that searing hot sunshine that could damage these large soft leaves. As a result we do not need to hide these wonderful plants away in shady spots to avoid direct sunshine but we do need to consider another factor of this evolution and adaption to sheltered woodlands and that is their leaves are also not tolerant of strong winds and that is what we all need to protect them from.



Another of my favourite plantings where *Fritillaria pallidiflora* and *Fritillaria meleagris* are among the taller bulbs that grow through the swarm of *Dicentra eximia* x *D. Formosa* hybrids in front of *Rhododendron* 'Dora Amateis'.

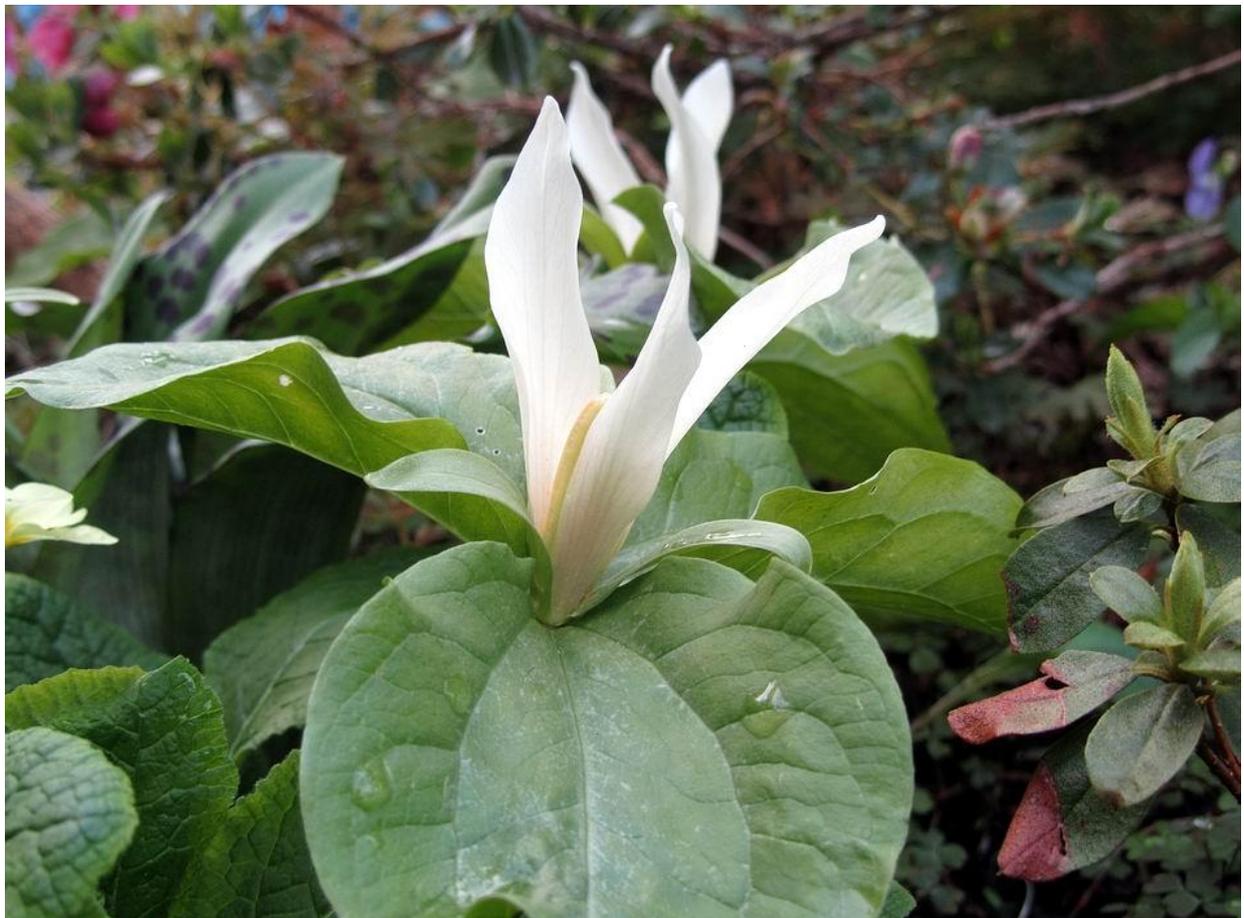


Mid to late May is the time in our garden when *Corydalis solida* completes its growth for the season and retreats back underground. The collapsed yellow leaves guide me to the tubers below and reminds me this is the ideal time to lift and divide them before I lose track of their whereabouts.



Some of the *Corydalis* are planted in mesh bottomed pots that make it very easy to lift and divide the tubers every year causing minimal damage to them or to their close neighbours. I use this method mostly when I plant out clones and can expect a good rate of increase. In a good growing year I get at least a doubling of numbers as each tuber produces two shoots and so two new tubers are formed – I have had as much as a 400 per cent increase from a single tuber in one year. I always take the opportunity to refresh the soil by mixing a good amount of leaf mould back into the planting.

My preference nowadays is for mixing all the colours of the *Corydalis* together in our plantings and this makes it less easy to lift and divide the tubers at this time. Also, as many of these plantings are now covered over with the ground cover plants such as *Anemone* and *Dicentra*, as shown in some of the pictures above, it is not always possible to split the *Corydalis* at this time. If they are not split the tightly packed tubers will eventually compete with each other and after about three to five years vigour and flowering will diminish. I can split them any time before late August or September when they will start to form new roots.



Trillium albidum



Both the plant in the previous picture and this one are often called *Trillium albidum* and have gone under that name for many years in Scotland at least. The more I read the available literature on these beautiful plants the more confused I become and I have to draw the conclusion that they, like so many plants, do not conform to the taxonomy – especially when growing in gardens. The one immediately above has bigger petals that display a deep pink centre and it has a beautiful scent – it looks to me to be intermediate and perhaps a hybrid of *Trillium chloropetalum*. I learned many years ago not to let the confusion in the precise names of these plants to get in the way of my enjoying them in our garden.



When we grow a number of these species together in our gardens hybridisation occurs.



This is one of my favourites with mottled colouring of the petals – it is most likely a hybrid between *Trillium flexipes* and *T. erectum*. Many of these hybrids are fully fertile and so we will see increasing numbers of hybrids in our gardens.





When it first opened the flower on this **Trillium ovatum** was purest white but as the flower ages the anthocyanin's develop bringing first a slight pink flush which deepens until it is a rich deep purple.



Trillium grandiflorum also exhibits this colour change as the white flowers take on a pink flush as they age but in our garden they never go quite as dark as those of the *Trillium ovatum* shown earlier. Just now as the flowers start to fade is also the time I will lift and split the bigger clumps of Trilliums.



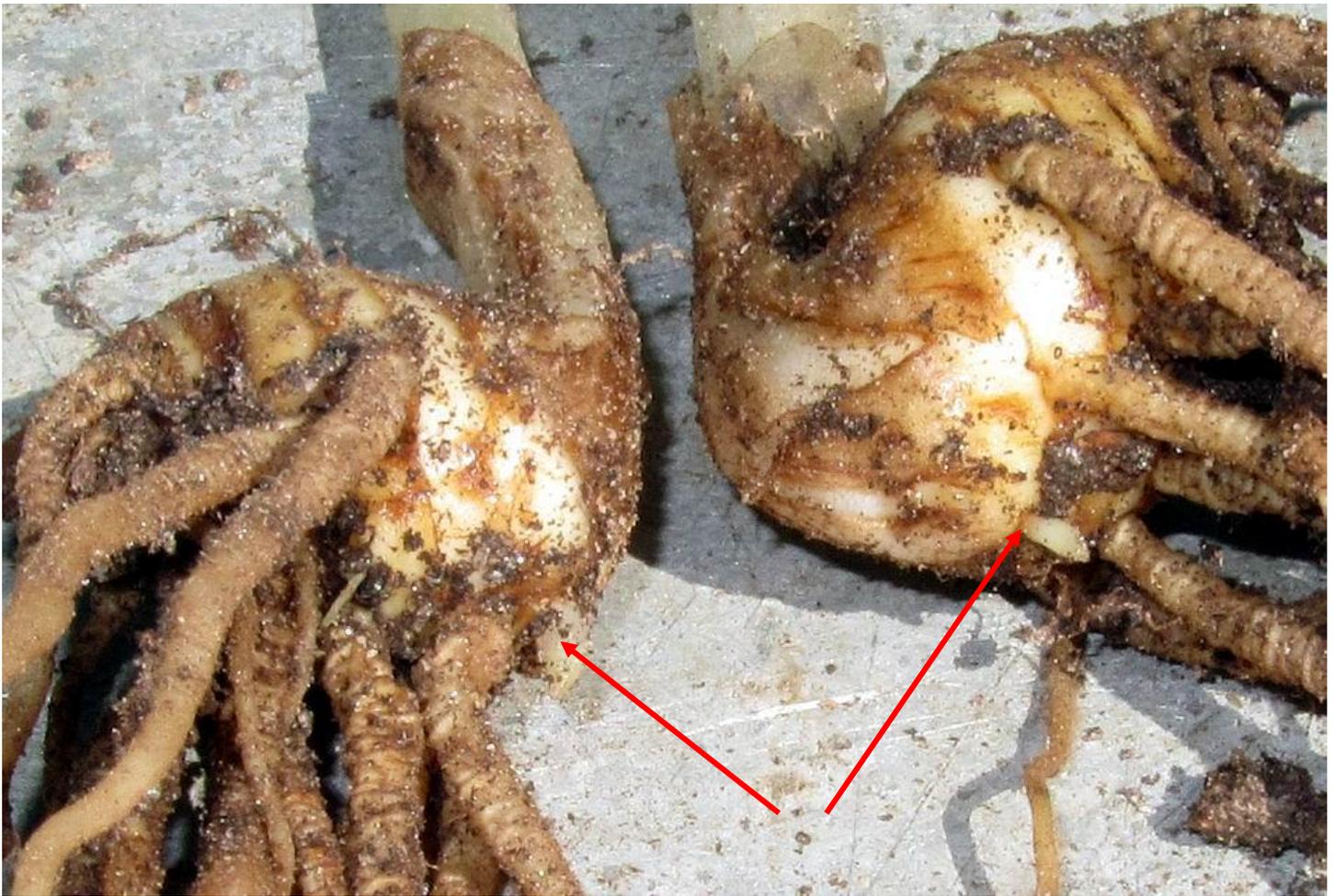
This is a pot of Trillium seedlings flowering for the first time after about five years of growth in the seed frames. Now is the ideal time to plant them out.



The first point to note is the good root growth that has come out of the pot into the sand plunge and this should not be damaged if possible. Understanding the type of storage structure you are working with being it a bulb, corm, tuber, rhizome – and its exact growth cycle so you know what it is doing and when is the key to being able to grow bulbs or any plants better.



With our open gritty compost it is relatively easy to get the plants separated out so the roots are for the most part undamaged.



So why is this the best time to handle Trilliums? The picture above hold the clue – I have pointed out the tip of a new root just emerging from the front of the rhizome and it is these roots that the plant needs to grow normally next year - if you damage these new roots at all you will harm next year's growth. Traditionally people have written that you divide your Trilliums either in the autumn as the leaf growth subsides or in the spring just as the plant is coming into growth - these are the wrong times. If you lift the plants at either of these times you will damage the new roots and that is why the plants will not grow on so well the year after dividing. If you lift and split them carefully now then plant them back immediately watering them in well the new roots will grow normally and the plants flower freely next year. Previous years' roots do persist to support the rhizome and so you should ensure they



are not damaged excessively or allowed to dry out – I either cover them over with a damp towel or spray them regularly with water to keep them always moist. While these roots of previous years' growth remain active for several years to support the plant they will not allow the plants to flower normally if the new root growth is damaged.

Similarly if you buy Trilliums as bare 'bulbs' without any root in the autumn do not expect to see any growth above the ground the following spring. Effectively you bought a cutting – an un-rooted piece of stem- with good conditions roots should start to form the following spring and the plant should make some growth the following year.



I have to take care when planting out in our highly populated garden as I am never sure what may be underground however planting at this time of year does have the advantage that there is evidence above ground of the locations of most plants. I use my own modified trowel pushing it down into the ground moving it back and forward to create a slot that I can feed the roots down into. I can use my hand to push the long roots all

the way down to the bottom of the slot then ensure the rhizomes are at the same depth as they were before filling in the slot with added leaf mould and finally a good watering from the watering can without the spray on the end to wash the soil mix down so the roots are in good contact with the soil and that there are no large air pockets.





Paris polyphylla growing happily through *Dicentra formosa*



Paris japonica has settled in well and flowered well for the last three years – it has the largest most showy flowers of all the genus



Paris japonica



The decorative part of the Hellebore flowers are the bracts so they persist providing interest long after the true petals have dropped here it is complementing the common primrose – *Primula vulgaris*.....