



BULB LOG 46.....13th November 2013



Autumn leaves



Now I have been home for nearly a week I am settling back into my routine and I can see all the jobs that I need to catch up on after my month away in North America.

One of those tasks is leaf collecting. The scale of this job in our garden has been put into perspective by what I was seeing in America where they have so many more trees and so have leaves by the tonne to lift. The silver leaves of this *Celmisia* seedling with a congested clumping growth habit stand out against the red *Acer* leaves. All our leaves will be recycled into

leaf mould and spread to keep the goodness they contain in the garden soil.



The autumn colour scene is continued with the fertile dark seeds of **Paeonia cambessedesii** contrasting with the non-fertile red ones.

For any of you that did not recognise the details of a famous picture that I showed in last week's bulb log it is 'Les Femmes d'Alger' by Picasso. Painted in 1907 it shocked even Picasso and it was 1916 before he felt brave enough to exhibit it.

It is hard for our eyes, conditioned by modern images, to understand the shock that such a work had on the public at the time.





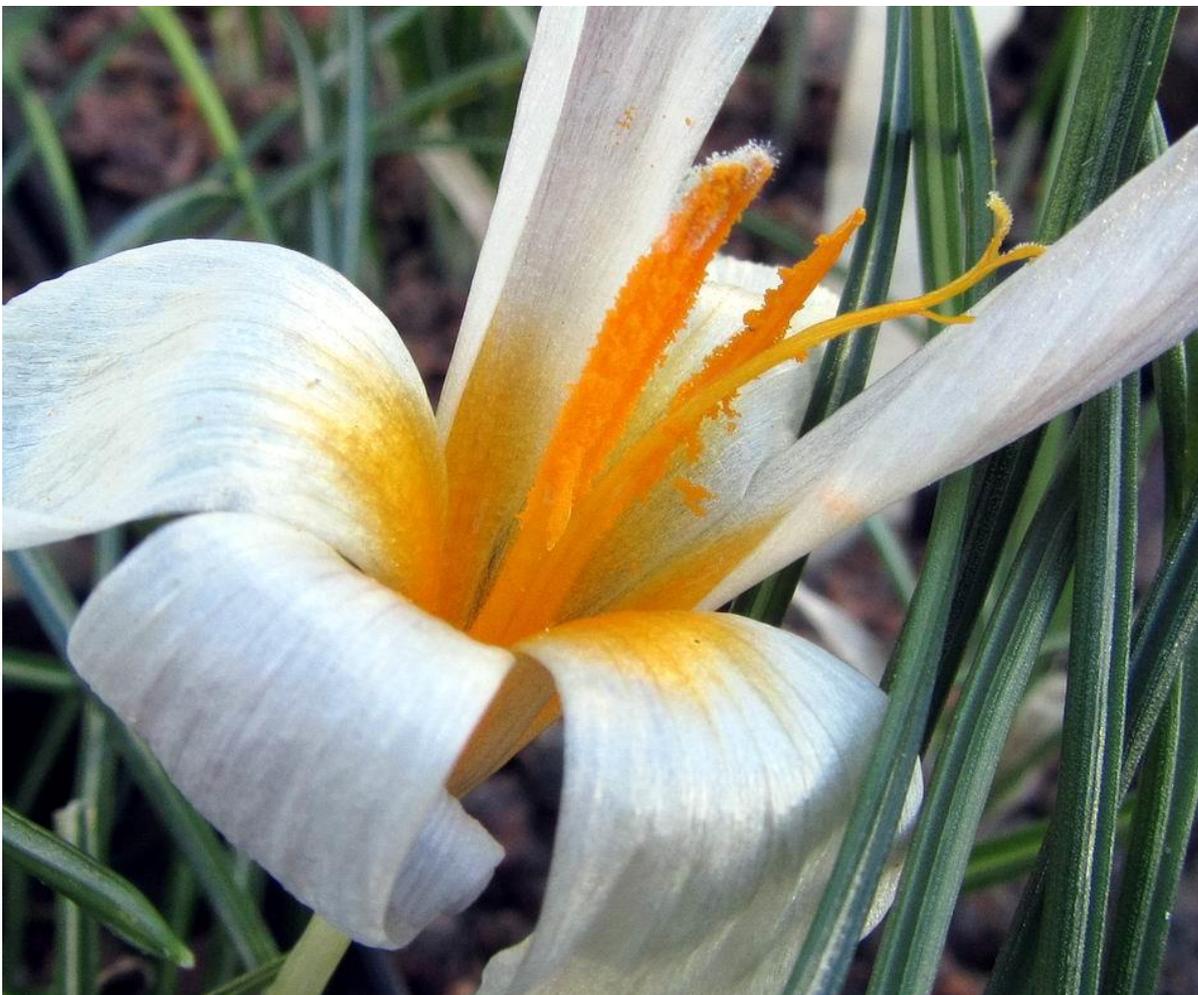
I am back to my daily inspection of the bulb houses where Crocus flowers are currently the most dominant feature and indeed I have missed quite a few during my absence.



One of the most important tasks for me at this time of year is removing the flowers as they start to wither. I will not know until the spring if they have been successful in their purpose of attracting pollinators and been fertilised. Just because pollen has been transferred onto the stigma does not mean that the seeds will be fertile. The pollen requires a steady temperature to allow it to grow down the tube to fertilise the seed waiting in the ovary below the ground.



Even when they are fading the collected flowers still provide a colourful spectacle which I like to record.



People in warm dry areas may wonder about my obsession to remove the old flowers but the reason becomes apparent if you observe this picture carefully.

Due to the cold moist air mould is already forming on the pollen on both the anthers and the stigma. If left grey mould will engulf the flower and can transfer down to the corm below.



Crocus laevigatus



Crocus goulimyi



Galanthus peshmenii



Galanthus reginae olgae

I do admit to having a few snowdrops in pots. The only way we can keep Galanthus peshmenii and G. reginae olgae alive in our garden is to grow them in pots. All our attempts to get these early flowering types growing in the garden have been unsuccessful, but we will continue to try, hoping that we may find a spot where a hardy clone will settle.



Bulb house

While it is the Crocus that currently dominate as far as flowers go the Narcissus leaves make up the bulk of the growth in the bulb houses. Last year we had such a poor cold wet summer that there was no noticeable difference as we moved through autumn and into early winter. This lack of a defined temperature drop meant many of the Narcissus appeared late with a shorter time to grow roots and leaves before the flowers, which were also later to appear.



Not this year all growth looks good with plenty of leaf and flower buds already quite advanced.



I did not re-pot many bubs at all this year, largely due to replacing the bulb house staging, but there is no evidence that the bubs are suffering any shortage of feed. Many pots of Narcissus have multiple buds rising up from what were single bulbs when they were last re-potted.



Narcissus cantabricus foliosus is again one of the earliest to flower.



I am pleased to see **Fritillaria davidii** raised from seed, ex Darren Sleep, sown in 2011 is appearing again. – I have not had any long term success with this plant before – the first time I got a single small bulb it did not like our conditions and failed to appear in the second year, the same happened when I got another but this time starting with seed I hope that I can keep it going.



Although they do not flower until well into the spring **Ornithogalum** leaves are well developed.



I am still very satisfied with the new staging which with my drainage system allows me to collect and recycle any water and hence nutrients that drain out.



I was slightly disappointed that I did not get more flowers on the **Sternbergia** this year, I cannot blame the lack of heat this time, as we had a hot summer, so suspect that I need to feed them a bit more to build up the bulbs. They have developed good leaves already which indicates that it is not a shortage of nitrogen that is the problem so I intend to make sure they get extra potassium this season, starting this supplement sooner than I have done in the past.



Some that did flower, like this ***Sternbergia sicula***, look to be setting good seed. You cannot be sure of seed at this stage as some bulb seed capsules will swell as if they are fertile only to disappoint as they are inflated by air.



More leaves than flowers this year so ***Scilla lingulata*** is another candidate for regular potassium during the growing season, watch this space for details.....