



BULB LOG 39.....25th September 2013



To get the best increase and visual effect from bulbs planted in the garden it is best to lift and divide them every two or three years. If left for much longer you will start to notice a decline in vigour - you will have many more leaves than flowers as the bulbs struggle in an increasingly congested clump to get sufficient nutrient. Ideally I like to plant bulbs out individually then let them form small clumps for around three years before I lift and divide them. This group of Colchicums were divided two years ago and now instead of a congested clump we have a pleasing, nicely-spaced grouping.



The flower-power of well-spaced Colchicum bulbs can be astonishing as you will see from the number of flowering stems rising from each of the bulbs in that clump.



Three different forms of *Colchicum* are seen in the foreground and it is my intention to lift and divide them next year when the leaves turn yellow. It is not too late to lift and split the bulbs now as long as you handle them carefully to minimise damage to the emerging roots. I believe that there are two ideal times to carry out most tasks in the garden such as lifting and dividing. First is the ideal time in the plants' cycle to minimise disruption to the growth cycle and the second is the ideal time for the gardener – that is when you have time and remember. It would be far better to lift and split a clump of *Colchicum*s now than to leave them until they are dormant- chances are you will forget about them for another year and so it can go on with important tasks never getting done.



A group of *Colchicum speciosum album* which will be ok for another year or two before it needs splitting,



This *Cyclamen hederifolium* has a very good leaf pattern – it is growing with *Colchicum autumnale*.



A group of silver leaved forms of *Cyclamen hederifolium* with a *Crocus nudiflorus albus* in the foreground. In front of the log is meant to be the path!!



The group of *Crocus nudiflorus albus* which started from a single corm of *Crocus* 'Orla' that I showed last week is now in full flower and enjoying some warm days.



I cannot remember a year when we had so many hoverflies before. The warm sun and autumn flowering bulbs always bring them out but the numbers of them this years are quite fantastic.



I have observed that *Crocus medius* regularly pokes its stigma out of the still closed flower bud like this. I wonder if it is in the hope that pollination is successful before the flower opens and prevents the chance of being self-pollinated.



One of the most common and successful autumn crocus for the garden is *Crocus speciosus* and its many forms and hybrids. This is a typical form raised originally from wild collected seed – note the colour of the throat.



Other forms of *Crocus speciosus* have yellow throats - these fit into subspecies *xantholaimos*



This pot of *Crocus speciosus* subsp. *xantholaimos* shows the deep yellow throat that defines this form - it also shows that with swarms of hoverflies I have little cause to get out my paint brush to hand pollinate these flowers.



We grow both **Crocus pulchellus** (above) and the superficially similar *Crocus kotschyanus* (below) successfully in pots and the open garden. Both have a similar flower colour with white pollen – the main difference being the deep yellow markings towards the centre of the flower are more or less a continuous zone in *C. pulchellus* and form a W shape in *C. kotschyanus*.



Crocus kotschyanus



Not surprisingly with all these species growing in one small glasshouse and the ever attendant hoverflies, hybridisation can occur. I raised these flowers from my own seed collected from my pot of *Crocus speciosus* subsp. *xantholaimos* – as it was open pollinated I do not know which of the two previous species is the pollen parent but *Crocus pulchellus* as the closer relative has to be favourite. It is intermediate with well-marked flowers and deep yellow throat and white pollen.



The other good characteristic of this home grown hybrid is that it increases well vegetatively and by setting seed.

Here it is growing in a sand bed with some other *Crocus* and some of the smaller *Colchicum* species.

Sand Bed



Crocus hybrid increasing well in our sand bed.

Sternbergia greuteriana 2

I have read that some people regard Sternbergia as insignificant and not of any decorative value – I would not say that.

It is one of the smallest of the Sternbergia that we grow but has a relatively large flower for its height and if I could get a good pot full of flowering bulbs it would be quite stunning.





Sternbergia greuteriana 1

This form is even smaller than the one above – the gravel is less than 6mm which will give an idea of scale. The length of the flower when it is closed is 2cm - twice the length of the stem above the ground. An interesting observation is that this clone reflexes right back in warm conditions while clone 2 (above) seems to stop at around 90 degrees.



Sternbergia sicula

I am always fascinated with this genus and the relationship between the three main species of *Sternbergia lutea*, *S. sicula* and *S. greuteriana* so I observe them closely. Note how this form of *sicula* retains the goblet shape.



In exactly the same hot conditions this form spreads its petals opening out almost flat.



There were many more hoverflies on this flower most of the time but my movements with the camera spooked them so this is the best I could do.....