





A walk round a garden should be rewarding no matter what the time of year. I am not so encouraged to go out when we have the dark wet windy days but when the skies are blue and the frost is in the ground I always tour the garden. Seeing the first signs of buds expanding and the odd Galanthus flowering through the fallen leaves along with the sliver coloured Cyclamen leaves are among the many rewards for venturing out.

It is also a time of year I can see and plan jobs that need to be done, at the moment I am looking up as many of our trees need some work to lighten their canopy. I see our garden as a small pocket landscape and because of the relatively small size it is essential that we are in control especially of the larger plants such as shrubs and trees. Management of the canopy is important to allow sufficient light through to the bulbs and other plants below. I have now worked out which limbs need to come off and hopefully the weather will be kind and I will get the chance to do the work in the next few months.



There are still the remains of many seed pods on the Erythronium and despite the advanced state of decay some seeds are still retained inside.

My routine walks also serve to remind me of the jobs that I did not get done. This mass of dead *Dactylorhiza* stems reminds me that I had intended to lift and divide this clump as the flowers faded - now it will have to wait. I would not do it in the winter but may decide to split them in the early spring just as the ground starts to warm up encouraging the hibernating plants to return growth.



Our garden is a series of landscapes within an overall landscape - the above view is of a raised humus bed surrounded by gravel which over the years has become a great seed bed for self-sown plants. The mass of new leaves appearing are of *Corydalis* 'Craigton Blue' and its seedlings along with some *Cyclamen*.



Our troughs are also small landscapes within the garden and they can be viewed individually or from a wider view as a grouping. I see many similarities between these two granite troughs and the image above of the raised bed





Saxifaga brunonis, here in its winter state, plays only a small part in the overall garden but features prominently in the planting of this small trough.



Trough with *Saxifaga brunonis* and silver saxifrages.



Saxifaga brunonis sends out multiple runners each with a tiny new plant on the tip which makes it very easy to propagate – all I need to do is break some of the new rosettes off and place them onto another trough where as long as the conditions are favourable they quickly take root. Not surprisingly then that it is present in a number of our troughs.





Above is a relatively recently landscaped trough which will soon take on a more established look like the one below which has been planted for a number of years now.





This is one of the first troughs that I landscaped with broken cement in place of natural rocks. Builders who were working next door tipped some unused cement from their mixer onto the ground at the end of the day - the next day when they arrived they broke up the thin sheet of cement that had now hardened and were surprised when I asked if I could have it.

At between 1 to 3cms thick the broken bits were perfect for making a small crevice style landscape in this trough. At the time I had a single silver saxifrage plant in a pot that I tore apart into individual rosettes, each with a small amount of root, and planted it across the trough. Now it is so well established that I have to remove some rosettes every year as I do not want to lose sight of all the stone work. The dried seed stems are of *Dactylorhiza purpurella* that self-seeded into the trough, growing in harmony with the saxifrage.



Saxifraga longifolia in one of the raised beds looks like it might flower next year – if it does I will have to hope I get seed as it is monocarpic.

I wrote last week about how long it has been since I last watered the bulb houses and this week I am reminded just how quickly that situation can change. Because the air had been heavy with moisture the plants had all the water they needed but as soon as the sun comes out the air dries and I have to ensure that the bulbs have sufficient moisture. One of the first signs of lack of water in a plant is that it flops over as these Narcissus stems and leaves have done but



before I rush to water I must make sure that the compost has not become frozen which also locks up moisture.



Another indicator that I use is the colour of the gravel topdressing – it is easy to see the gravel on the pot on the left is slightly darker because it is covered in moisture while the lighter coloured one on the right is dry. As there are no signs of leaf growth in these pots I will not water either of them.



Here you can see clearly that the gravel on the left hand pot with the Narcissus is paler and so drier than the right hand one also the leaves are starting to collapse so as I have checked it is not frozen I will now add some water.



The other basic rule I adopt is to always water the bulbs on a bright, frost free preferably windy day when they have the longest time before sunset for surplus water to drain away.



Narcissus romieuxii

Despite the mild start to winter the Narcissus are flowering later than this time last year when we had many more in flower by this date.



**Narcissus
romieuxii**



Narcissus romieuxii



Narcissus romieuxii



A series of *Narcissus romieuxii* forms and hybrids round off this week.....