



BULB LOG 04.....21st January 2014

The many factors that influence when any particular plant comes into growth and/or flower are much discussed but not fully understood. Nature has a way of keeping some secrets from us and this is why I am so fascinated by watching how the same garden varies every year. You would think that with the relatively mild, or at least not cold, winter we have had so far that this Hellebore would be at an advanced stage of growth but it is not - in 2011 for instance the stems were longer and



the flowers were open by the 8th of January, see left. I think that temperature fluctuations have more of an influence on the growth than absolute temperatures. So while two winters can have the same average daily temperature the range of temperatures that make up that average can be very different. This winter has been steadily cool with few deep frosts, so far, so few large temperature gradients and I think plants respond faster to sudden changes. I will cut off last year's leaves from the Hellebore soon - before the smaller bulbs in that area come into growth.

The growth of Colchicum leaves is one of the factors I observe each year - this year these are quite advanced compared to the Hellebore above which is behind; so different plant types are influenced by different parameters. I always try and avoid using the term 'later than normal' because I do not know what a *normal* season is.





While looking around the garden I found a precocious white flower of *Hepatica pyrenaica* that had been out for some time. This makes a colourful vignette with the fallen leaves and berries lying among the mosses that invade our gravel beds.



Cyclamen coum



Galanthus 'Ramsay'



Crocus laevigatus

It is not just the weather conditions that influence when a plant will flower – the genetic make-up also has an effect. The first *Crocus laevigatus* flowered in our bulb house last September and there has not been a week since when we did not have a flower on one of our many seed grown plants of this species. If we only grew a single clone then you would expect them all to flower around the same time but the genetic variation found in seed raised plants greatly extends the flowering period.



Above and below are the left and right hand plunges in the bulb house. We are probably around the peak flowering time of the hoop-petticoat types with thousands of individual flowers. I know many of you like to compare your season with mine and this website is the ideal place to do that. With many growers scattered all over the world it is simply not possible to come together on a regular basis so [the forum](#) is the ideal meeting place where we can share our experiences and flowers.





The cold damp conditions are ideal for grey mould to thrive and as the moisture laden flowers start to go past they create the ideal breeding ground. In dry sunny air the flowers would lose moisture and dry out as they fade but in the very cold humid air they just sit saturated and attract grey mould as you see above and below.



I do not cut the stem when I remove the flowers but simply pull them away leaving the ovary intact in the hope of getting seed. Now the first flowers are fading the other task I have in mind is feeding with potassium – I will add the white powder soon before the next watering. Since I changed from clay pots to plastic ones I have to water a lot less frequently so it is very important to get the potassium supplement into the bulbs. The time bulbs need potassium is as the flowers fade then their growth switches towards seed production and next season's flower buds.



Narcissus albidus kesticus

There is a distinctive difference to the plant I know as *Narcissus albidus kesticus*, the stems have an almost glaucous tint topped by pure white funnel shaped flowers with green striped petals.





Narcissus romieuxii 'Hat'

Like butterfly wings the flowers start all wrinkled and creased slowly emerging as the flower matures.



Narcissus romieuxii 'Hat'

As they unfurl the buds of *Narcissus romieuxii* 'Hat' reveal the lobed corona – this is one of the many plants I got from the late Kath Dryden. Kath was an inspiration to us and she and Maurice are sorely missed.



***Narcissus romieuxii rifanus* M.S.**

Narcissus romieuxii rifanus is another that came originally from Kath Dryden the original material was collected by Mike Salmon. It is very different from another plant I grow as *Narcissus romieuxii rifanus* which has smaller upward facing flowers. You can see from these pictures that the flowers can be white or pale yellow however all have the same wide flared corona that rolls back on itself – they also have exserted style and anthers.





Narcissus romieuxii seedlings can have considerable variation in size shape and colour of the flowers



Narcissus 'Craigton Clumper'

The reason I named Narcissus 'Craigton Clumper' was because of its vigour. Young seed raised bulbs will nearly always display more vigour than old clones but this seedling was the most prolific free flowering clone of Narcissus romieuxii I have grown. This 8cm pot has broken my record with 55 flowering stems showing that you do not need large pots to enjoy lots of flowers. I would be happy with a single bulb in a 7cm pot but with Narcissus 'Craigton Clumper' it does not take many years to increase to a full pot of bulbs like this.



The plunge staging in the prop households mostly 7cm pots with just two rows of 8cm pots which means we can have 262 pots in this relatively small area 600 x 2360.



Two adjacent 8cm pots, on the right, of *Narcissus romieuxii* JCA805 and *Narcissus* 'Craigton Clumper' have almost 100 flowers between them. The more intense yellow flowers are forms of *Narcissus bulbocodium*.



The other end of the plunge has more Narcissus and Crocus (just starting to flower) with a few other species such as Sternbergia, Galanthus, Fritillaria and Iris – did you spot the Iris buds?



Across the end of this glasshouse is where I have a sand plunge with the bulbs planted directly into the sand – they are just starting to come into flower now.....