



BULB LOG 24.....11th June 2014



Allium and Rhododendron



For me the joy and beauty of a garden is not about individual specimen plants but about combinations and associations between the plants – such as the juxtaposition of the globular flower of an Allium backed by the pink flowers of Rhododendron ‘Albert Schweitzer’. Another unlikely but successful combination is of Clematis australis from New Zealand with its scented lime green flowers growing up through the scarlet flowers of Crinodendron hookerianum from Chile. Your eye is so drawn to the scarlet flowers that you do not at first notice the masses of Clematis flowers.



Crinodendron hookerianum

We have two plants of Crinodendron, one in the rear, south facing garden and this one in the front; both are in flower just now. We had a third which did not come through the last severe winter we had a few years ago – these surviving two lost their foliage and suffered die back of the smaller branches but new buds broke from the larger branches and main stem. It is easily propagated by soft or semi hard wood cuttings which is how I raised it in the first place from a plant that has grown in friend's garden in Aberdeen for around 70 years.



Clematis australis



Oxalis incarnata

I have no idea how we acquired *Oxalis incarnata* it appeared tens of years ago in our glasshouses and it has been with us ever since. It forms small bulbils which remain in the ground even if you try and pull out the main plant. As it grows in the sand below the plunges, which I used for rooting cuttings, I have never tried to eradicate it totally. When we planted up the front garden as part of the regeneration last year I spread some of the sand along with the cuttings from the green house and now we have a carpet of *Oxalis incarnata*.



The effect is enhanced as I also planted out some *Tropaeolum tricolorum* tubers, which is making another nice Southern hemisphere combination of foliage and flowers. I know that this *Oxalis* is considered a weed by many but I like the effect, the plant is not causing too much competition for any other plant and I suspect that both of these plants will be severely checked if not wiped out as soon as we get a normal winter – last winter was unusually mild.



Arthurdendyus triangulatus

On moving a trough, the reason for that move will be explained below, I found a New Zealand flat worm. Some years back we must have accidentally introduced these into the garden and were finding them everywhere, but over the years nature seems to have found a balance and we only find the occasional one now.



Saxifraga brunonis

The masses of bright red thread-like runners cover the lime green rosettes like spun sugar decoration on a fancy dessert – on the end of each is a tiny new rosette which if it finds the conditions favourable will lay down roots and form a new plant. Read more on this plant in an edition of the [International Rock Gardener](#) from September 2011 .



This trough has a combination of different Saxifrages – the flowers of the red spotted cultivar on the left contrasts beautifully with the dainty red runners of *Saxifraga brunonis* on the right. Now the reason for moving the trough was that sometimes it is best to isolate a subject from its background so as not to distract the view.



I am sure that you will agree that placed against a neutral grey background the trough takes on a starring role and we can better appreciate the landscaping contained within it.



Another trough 'portrait' shows a chance combination where the *Dactylorhiza* seedlings appeared growing through the silver saxifrage. It was not entirely by chance as I did remove the stem of the *Dactylorhiza*, from a raised bed, when the seed capsules started to split scattering the dust-like seeds over a number of troughs.



The parent plants of this the smallest *Dactylorhiza* we grow are in a raised bed and their scale, at less than 15cms high, fits in perfectly with the other alpine plants.



At a recent public event I was asked what is my favourite plant ? This is never an easy question to answer when I love all plants but, in such circumstances, I usually name the plant that happens to be in flower at that time and I choose *Erinus alpinus*. Such an easy plant to grow; it self-seeds around and many consider it also to be a weed but not me - a few years ago we asked a friend who had a good range of colours for some seed and now we also have a wider range of colours than we had before. Yes it will seed around generously if you let it, neither does it pose any challenge to our horticultural skills but how much pleasure it brings us with its masses of colourful flowers.



Globularia bellidifolia* and *Edrianthus serpyllifolius

Globularia bellidifolia was a plant made popular by Jack Drake's great nursery - we first got it there some time in the 1970's and have kept it going and propagated it by taking cuttings ever since.



Allowing plants to seed around plays a very large part of our garden style as this picture shows with *Corydalis* and *Aquilegia* in abundance. Control is easiest managed by removing the flower heads before the seed ripens and we sometimes do that; the other way is simply getting down, and pulling the seedlings as they germinate. We only ever hand weed in our garden and the rule is that you must identify the seedling before pulling – this is an enjoyable, educative and therapeutic exercise for a sunny warm day.



Corydalis capitata

One of the plants that seeds around is *Corydalis capitata* which is named for the way the flowers are held in a cap like bunch on the top of the stems.



Among the many *Corydalis* seedlings we are finding hybrids that look to be between *Corydalis capitata* and *Corydalis* 'Craigton Blue'.



***Corydalis* 'Craigton Blue'**



Erythronium japonicum, sibericum and dens-canis seeds

Many bulbs have ripe seeds at the moment and the question we must ask ourselves is should we sow them right away or store them for a later sowing. There is no simple answer that covers all types and even if there were it would vary depending on your garden climate and conditions but there are some basic guidelines. As a general guide seeds of plants that grow in cooler climates, such as *Erythronium japonicum*, *sibericum* and *dens-canis* are accustomed to their seeds being always moist so I sow them immediately they are ripe.



The next question is what is the best depth at which to sow the seeds? I have always thought that because this group of *Erythronium* have elaiosomes that they would grow best if sown deeply like *Narcissus*, *Crocus*, etc. but my trials have shown the opposite. I have conducted trials for a number of years comparing sowing these species both deeply and on the surface with a covering of gravel. To date and to my surprise none of those

sown deeply have germinated while all those near the surface have. Trials with other genera have proven to me that seeds with elaiosomes definitely germinate and grow on best if sown deeply – this just shows that we should always ask questions, never take things for granted as there are always exceptions and no single way is the only way. I continually study plants at every stage of growth, both their above and below ground parts in an attempt to fully understand their growth cycles, the better to grow them.



Erythronium sibericum , below, and japonicum, above, seeds germinating.



Seed pots

I am continually experimenting with my methods of growing seed – I received these seeds of various bulbous genera, Crocus, Narcissus, Tulipa and Fritillaria in February, much later than I would ideally like to sow them, which would be late August/early September. I soaked all but the flat wind-borne seeds of Fritillaria and Tulipa, overnight in some water, see [Bulb Log 0914](#) ; sowed them next day and placed the seedpots in an open frame. After a month or so I moved the pots under glass but no germination occurred. As the season advanced and the glasshouses started to heat up I placed the pots in the open again and then some weeks after that germination occurred. I have always said that bulb seed has a ‘time window’ when seeds will want to germinate and if you miss that you may have to wait a year before you see germination. However I have also said that it is not really a time that triggers plants but conditions resulting from a complex combination of temperatures, light, moisture etc. that the plants have evolved to respond to in able to maximise their chance of growth and survival. These conditions obviously relate to the natural habitat of the plants and it is there we should look for the clues. Other years when I have received similar seeds at that time I sowed the Crocus and Narcissus but kept the Fritillaria for an autumn sowing - using that method I got good germination the following spring, one year on from sowing. I have no doubt that soaking the seeds before sowing them this year assisted in getting this early germination – of course there are many other factors to take into account such as the conditions the seeds were stored in, the variations in moisture and temperature since I sowed them but I will make the effort to always soak them in future.



As I only received one pot of Fritillaria I decided not to follow my usual practise of storing it until autumn but to just sow it with the other types and it too has germinated this year. This illustrates that there is no single way to treat your seeds; many ways will work. I will however continue to save any Fritillaria seeds I receive after December to be sown in time for the first autumn soaking. In my experience and in our climate this type of seed stand a very high risk of rotting over our cool wet summer if they do not germinate quickly.



Erythronium bulb showing offsets

I lifted this Erythronium seedling that had got into a sand bed because it was too large and crowding out the mostly smaller bulbs that this bed was intended for.



Some Erythronium seedlings will increase vegetatively like this while others, usually the most attractive, refuse to increase at all or maybe make a single division every five years or so.



Arisaema ciliatum and Lilium mackliniae

I will leave you this week with another combination of plants that make gardens not only beautiful but interesting places.....