



BULB LOG 11.....12th March 2014





Eranthis hyemalis

There is definitely a feel that spring is here with sunny days warming the air and the ground. The bulbs have responded rapidly putting on a great surge in growth. Early morning frosts quickly thaw away as the sun rises in the

sky and before long all the flowers, and the gardeners, are basking in the warmth.



The *Eranthis* flowers have been sitting in bud for so long now waiting for favourable conditions that they are showing the signs of ageing but they are still a very welcome sight after a long winter.

Once their seed is set I will lift and move some of the plants from the denser plantings so we can have *Eranthis* in every bed – I will also scatter the seed around.



I especially like to see mixed plantings where the plants can contrast and complement each other, as above: the Eranthis hand on the baton to the Paeony shoots which will soon take over the flowering interest in this area.



Working to keep groups of plants small rather than forming great clumps means regular lifting and dividing but I think it is well worth the effort. I intend to split the clumps of Galanthus in these pictures later this year and this will not only look better to my eyes but will also benefit the bulbs as they will not have to compete with each other for moisture and nutrients. If bulbs are left to clump up for too long they will become so congested that flowering will drop off.



Similar mixed plantings are repeated all around the garden.







A fine pink *Corydalis solida* is among the first of its type to flower this year.





Molly admires the flowers.



Megan, Lily and Molly come to see what I am doing.



Galanthus and *Corydalis malkensis*.



This fish box trough is showing wear and tear along the top edge but it has been in regular use for nearly 20 years. I use it to grow *Sanguinaria canadensis* f. *multiplex* 'Plena' so that I can divide the roots every year or two – also it is nice to see the beautiful flowers in the spring without having to worry that the large leaves when they emerge will overshadow smaller companions. Some years ago when splitting the roots I discovered a single small snowdrop bulb – I do not know if it came in with some of my recycled compost or if it was a seedling. Over the years this single bulb has now multiplied enough to fill the trough with flower early in the year before the *Sanguinaria* flower –this is a very good accidental association and illustrates in a trough the philosophy behind our garden plantings.



Looking over one of the raised slab-beds which is still in a winter state towards some of the mass plantings of mixed bulbs in full early flowering mode.

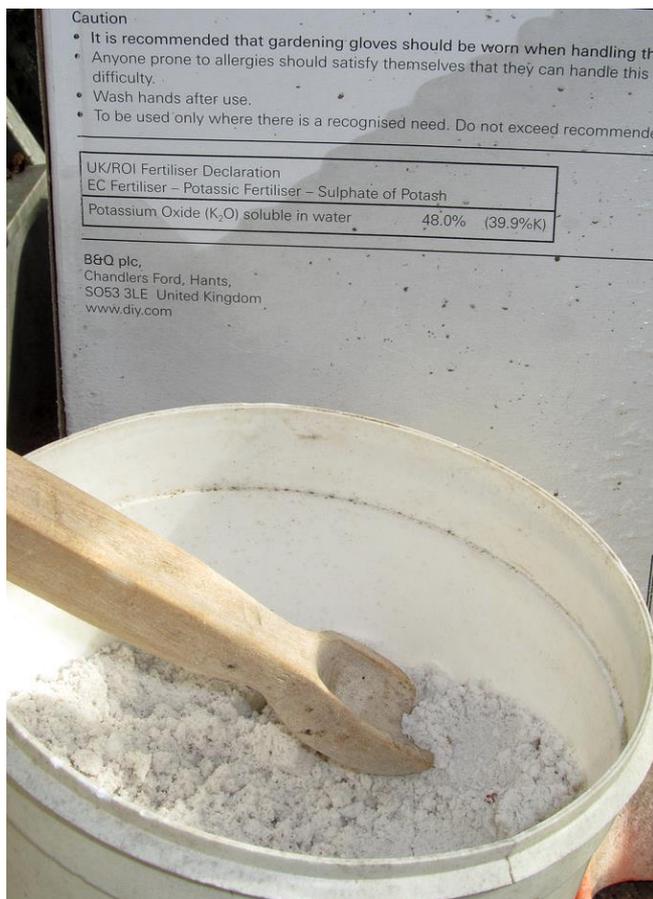


On a smaller scale this picture looks over the first sand bed with many bulbs in flower towards a small mountain landscape, made from cement blocks, where the first Saxifraga flowers are just opening.



Bringing you up to date with the bulb house growth you can see the mass of leaf growth - many Narcissus are now past flowering so my mind turns towards feeding. Perhaps the major change in culture between growing in clay and plastic pots is water retention - porous clay pots allow much more evaporation and so need much more watering. I probably water around one third less frequently since I switched over from clay to plastic pots so I have fewer opportunities to deliver the feed to the plants. With the weather forecast predicting a bright dry settled spell I have taken the opportunity to add the Potassium (Kalium) powder to the pots before I gave them all a good soaking. I add a small amount of the white powder to the surface of each pot – the quantity depends on the amount of growth

there is. In a larger pot, 11cm, full of growths I will add approximately a level teaspoonful – smaller pots get less and pots with little leaf growth and fewer bulbs less again. It is not an exact measure and my experience shows that it does not have to be too accurate I have not observed any damage to plants if I accidentally spread a bit too much. Three quarters of a 1kg box – approx 750gms – has fed the bulbs in the three bulbhouses.





There is also significant growth in the Fritillaria house so I have also fed them the potassium supplement. Previously I would tend to feed the frits a bit later but since converting to plastic pots and with every chance that the weather will swing back to cold and damp conditions I cannot let this fine weather window pass. It is better to give them the feed early than late so that the essential nutrients are available when the growth switches from the leaf and flower growth to the bulb and next year's buds.



7 cms pots of frits with the white powder form of Potassium – I flood each pot with water which will dissolve much of the powder. Do not worry if some lumps stay on the surface as this will still benefit the bulbs next time you water.



Narcissus seeds soaked over night and sown deep in October are germinating well now and these very young seedlings are the exception to the white powder treatment. I have found that feeding with the white powder form of Potassium as above can damage very young seedlings – you can add it later in the season. I feed young seedlings by adding a liquid tomato type food, with seaweed extract if you can get it, at ¼ the recommended dilution every time I water them.

I enjoy the process of watering each pot individually as I can observe exactly what is going on in each pot. I turn the label upside down in any pots that have no signs of growth- if growth does appear later in the season I will turn the label upright again. This way I can quickly tell at the end of the season which pots have had no growth and I may have lost so that I can check them. I do lose a small number of pots every year for many reasons.



One reason can be infestation or disease transferred by sap sucking insects so it is wise to look very carefully at all the growth to look for early signs of aphids. I discovered one tiny aphid on a seedling leaf and quickly wiped it out. I do not like using insecticide sprays unless it is absolutely necessary, I have not done so for over five years.

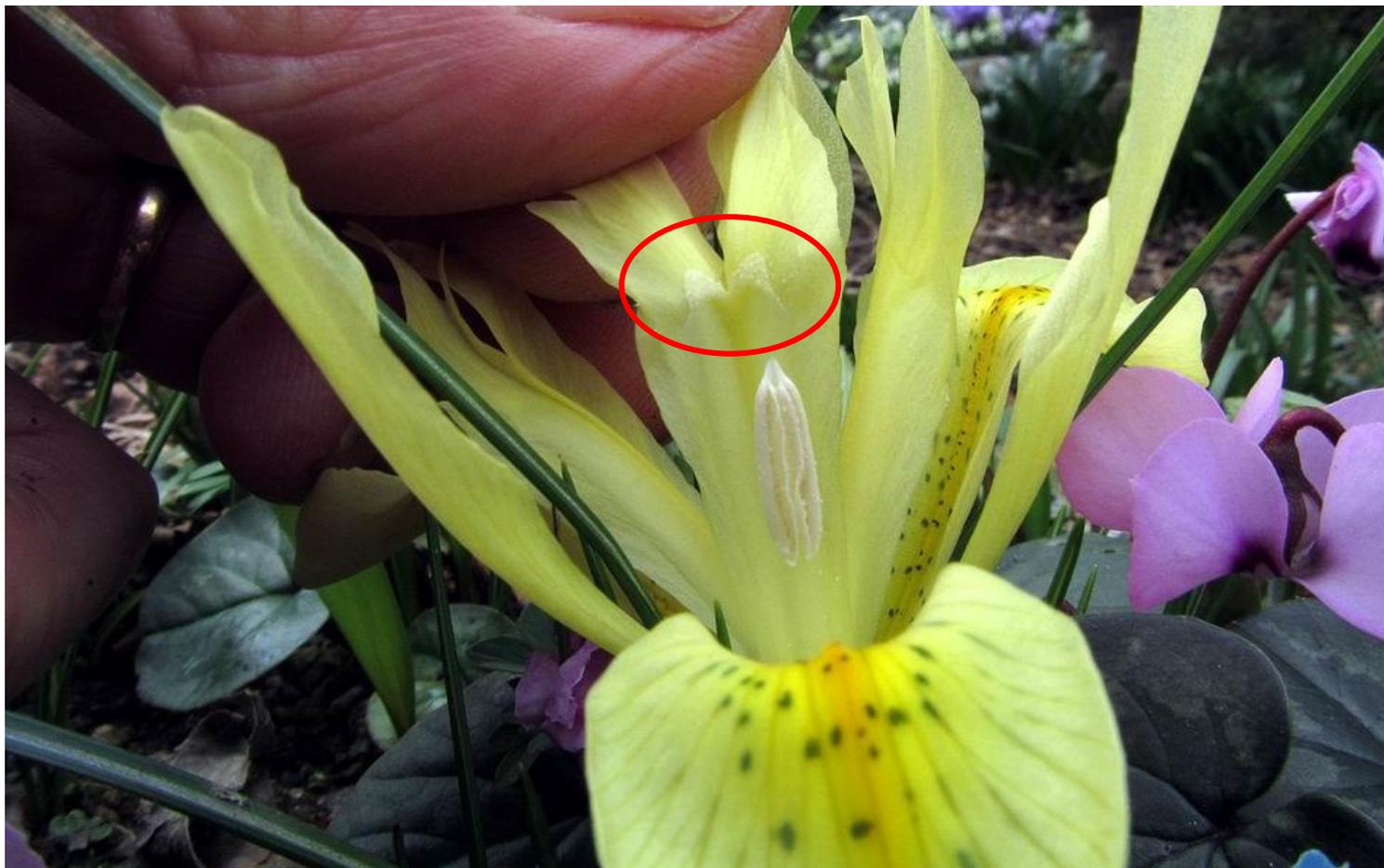




There are still many bulbs to flower in the prop-house plunge of 7cm pots – these were also fed and watered.



Narcissus cantabricus clusii



Iris winogradowii

We used to have a large patch of Iris winogradowii but we got careless and did not control the overgrowth of Rhododendrons that caused much of the precious Iris to dwindle away. I am now paying much more attention to this rare beauty.



Last year I pollinated the flowers and got a fat capsule of seeds. I am doing this again just now.

When the anther splits to allow the pollen to flow I run my thumb nail up the anther to collect some pollen, this is then transferred to the stigma which is hiding at the base of the V shaped notch on the upward pointing floral parts see picture above.



Narcissus cyclamineus is another plant that you need to raise from seed as the bulbs not increase very freely by offsets. Narcissus cyclamineus likes damp conditions and the seed is best soon as it was ripe. The seeds we sowed last year from this group are germinating now.



I will leave you this week with another picture of the bulbs beds dominated at the moment by Snowdrops and Snowflakes.....