



BULB LOG 38.....17<sup>th</sup> September 2014





**Crocus nudiflorus**

The title page picture and the next sequence all show *Crocus nudiflorus* and some of its variations. We basically grow two forms - the regular violet coloured one seems to have very little variation in colour – the two pictures on this page show the same planting a day apart. The difference in colour is entirely down to the camera and the white balance effect. I wish I did have that colour variation within our stock because I love seeing colonies of mixed colours no matter how subtle the differences are. One difference between the two images is that in the second one, taken the day after the first, a white form has opened and I hope that you agree this variation and contrast greatly enhances the scene. *Crocus nudiflorus* increases by stolons that emerge from the corm at the start of the growing season and form small cormlets at a short distance from the main corm. If left undisturbed *Crocus nudiflorus* do not form dense clumps like many a crocus but a dispersed colony that continually extends its boundaries. Perhaps I would see more variation in colour if I raised more of this species from seed.





### **Crocus nudiflorus alba**

I grow both the typical coloured form of *Crocus nudiflorus* and the white form in this sand plunge and both are migrating through the plunge baskets of mostly *Erythronium* – you may remember when I replanted the *Erythronium* last year I showed pictures of the crocus corms that I found and planted back in with the *Erythronium*. The first white form I received as a gift was *Crocus nudiflorus* ‘Orla’ but since then I have raised a number from seed. Seedlings from ‘Orla’ predominantly revert to the typical violet colour but a small percentage come white. I love examining our plants in fine detail just to marvel at their forms and to look for subtle variations.



### **Crocus nudiflorus ‘Orla’ and white seedling**

On the left is one of the original *Crocus nudiflorus* ‘Orla’ which have an off white slightly bluish pink flush when they first emerge which fades within a few days. On the right is a white seedling selected from ‘Orla’ seed.



***Crocus nudiflorus* 'Orla' and white seedling**

Compare these pictures showing the same two flowers from different angles and you should see clearly not only the slight variation in the colours but also that both flowers have distinct flower shapes – the seedling has more of a goblet type shape.





### **Crocus nudiflorus**

It is these variations that I enjoy and especially when they are growing in mixed colonies – the one problem I do have is that when they do intermingle like above I have no way of sorting them out with any certainty when repotting the corms.



### **Crocus speciosus hybrids**



## **Crocus speciosus hybrid**

How do I know this is a hybrid?  
I raised these plants from the seed I collected from a pot of *Crocus speciosus xantholaimos* growing in our bulb house – on inspecting the resulting seedlings I noticed a number of variations most noticeably that many had white rather than golden pollen. This feature is most likely to have come from *Crocus kotschyanus* which was growing alongside.

I am pleased and relieved to see so many still flowering in this sand plunge after the number of corms that were eaten by mice last winter.



**Crocus speciosus hybrid**



### **Crocus vallicola**

One thing we do have to be aware of when growing the autumn flowering Crocus in the garden is they are very delicate and liable to be flattened by wind, rain or anything else that comes along like a foraging slug – so get out and enjoy them as soon as they appear. Aware of this fragility I have taken some of the pots of *Crocus vallicola* into the frit-house so I can enjoy their flowers and to increase the chance of getting some to set seed.



### **Crocus suworowianus**

I have only been flowering *Crocus suworowianus* for a few years now.

I raised it from seed collected by a friend in the field as another species— this illustrates the problems of identifying plants from the seed alone.

Rather than being disappointed by this I was delighted as this is a species that I have wanted to grow for a long time.



**Colchicum speciosum album**

Much to my annoyance Colchicum are all too often referred to as 'Autumn Crocus' I have mentioned this before but am happy to state again here that this is totally misleading and frankly stupid - they are not even in the same family as Crocus.



**Colchicum speciosum**

My further response to those that do use that false term is that if we are to call Colchicum 'Autumn Crocus' then what should we call the true autumn flowering crocus?

So these colour forms of Colchicum speciosum are autumn flowering colchicum, yes, you also get spring flowering colchicum.



**Colchicum agrippinum and Crocus speciosus hybrid**



**Sternbergia sicula MJ, left and PB right**

Now I must mention that calling Sternbergia 'Autumn Daffodils' should also be avoided for all the same reasons.



**Sternbergia sicula MJ**

Any one that has followed the bulb log through 12 years will know that I have big problems with knowing just what Sternbergia sicula is. There seem to be many plants that share this name and I do not understand how they can all be a single species. Botanists have puzzled over this for many years and if you search the internet you will find a

number of fascinating papers.

So let's look at these two pots in a bit of detail. Look back to the first image of the two pots and you should notice that the flowers are different shapes also note the different lengths of the spathe – one, PB, is clearly longer in relation to the floral segments than the other.

Next look at the difference in size between the stamens, both dehiscent, again the form I am referring to as PB has larger stamens than the MJ form see the pictures on the next page which compare the two forms.



**Sternbergia sicula PB**



**Sternbergia sicula MJ**

Yet another distinguishing feature are the floral segments especially the outer three are distinctly boat-shaped in the PB form, below, but flatter in the MJ form, above.



**Sternbergia sicula PB**

The style of the PB form is also significantly longer terminating well above the anthers – this is less so in MJ.



My view from my observations as a grower is that the answer to these variations could be explained if we have *Sternbergia lutea* as the largest of the yellow autumn *Sternbergia* and *S. greuteriana* as the smallest and a swarm of hybrids in between. Whatever these plants are I love them all and am very pleased to be growing them



I will conclude this week with perhaps my favourite of this genus **Cyclamen mirabile**.....