



BULB LOG 39.....30<sup>th</sup> September 2015





The first of the autumn bulbs are now flowering in the bulb houses with **Crocus speciosus** and **Sternbergia sicula**.

I am not expecting a bumper flowering under glass this year as I failed to provide sufficient water this time last year –as a result the bulbs did not grow a sufficiently good root system to support full growth. The first sign that something was not right was when some of the leaf tips started to go brown in the spring. It is a salient lesson that the mistakes we make now may not become evident for some months or even a year so strict adherence to my own advice on watering is now being followed. In addition to ensuring the bulbs have ample water I have added a sprinkle of granular NPK 7-7-7 to the gravel of each pot, as I demonstrated a few weeks ago: this is me trying to make up for my failings last year by making absolutely sure that the roots not only have the essential water they need but that it will be laced with some readily available nitrogen – one of the building blocks for root growth.

I look on with envy at the magnificent clumps of Sternbergia some of you are growing in your gardens, and sharing in the [forum](#), they are absolutely beautiful. I have tried to grow it in various situations in our garden without any success the bulbs simply dwindle and die out

after a few years of misery - even under glass we struggle to achieve regular flowering.



**Sternbergia sicula**



### **Sternbergia leaves**

Almost one month on from the first soaking I am applying the second complete soaking taking time to flood each pot and also make sure that all the sand in the plunge is also soaked through.



### **Muscari leaves**

From now on I will water the pots relative to the amount of leaves that are showing. The growth above ground reflects that underground so bulbs that are early into leaf are also in a rapid root growth phase hence these pots will get watered frequently especially during sunny periods when the temperature in the bulb houses rises resulting in increased transpiration and evaporation rates.

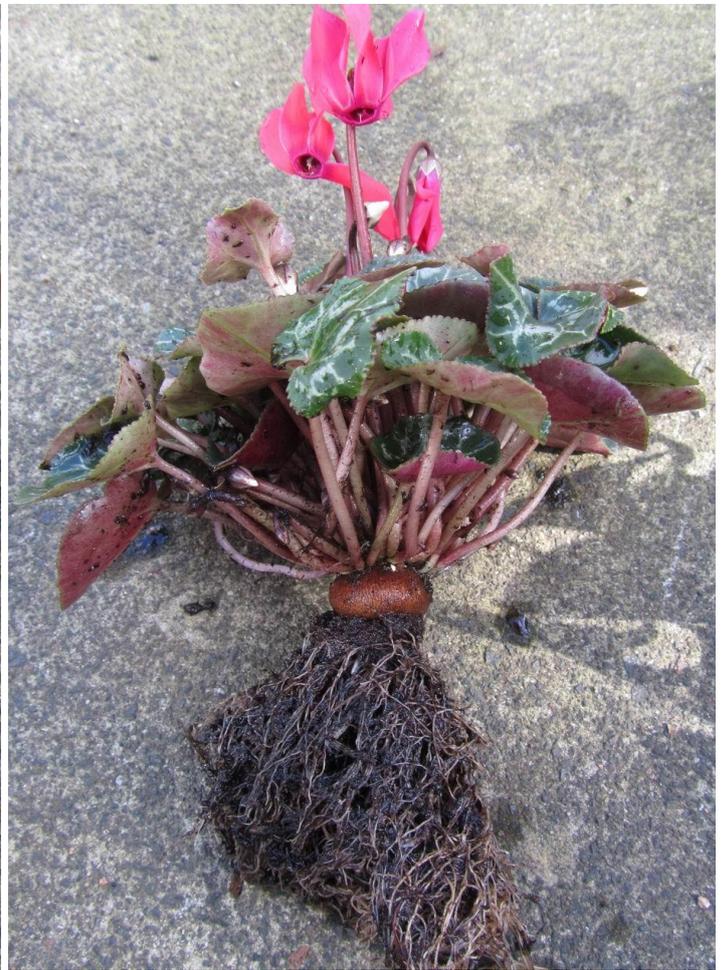


#### **Narcissus bulbocodium leaves**

We have many forms of *Narcissus bulbocodium*, from the larger types similar to those that are commonly offered commercially to the small compact forms that I prefer. This one with small leaves that tend to lie on the ground as well as smaller flowers, is among my favourites. For bulbs *Narcissus bulbocodium* can be quick and easy from seed with the first flowering possible in just three years.



On the same basis that small is beautiful I love the diminutive *Cyclamen mirabile* especially those with pink markings on their leaves.



We are all probably guilty of trying to grow too many plants – I am – it is something I am trying to address however I could not resist the temptation of buying a pack of four mini florists' cyclamen for £2.50 at the supermarket, then another four when they reduced them to just £1.49 for four plants.

That commercial growers can produce flowering sized plants like these from seed in less than a year is incredible but it is a pity that they then pot them into some horrible organic compost ready for sale. The growth from the corm is congested enough, with the number leaves and flowers that rise from it, without them then burying the corms and stem bases in compost that retains so much moisture –rots are inevitable.



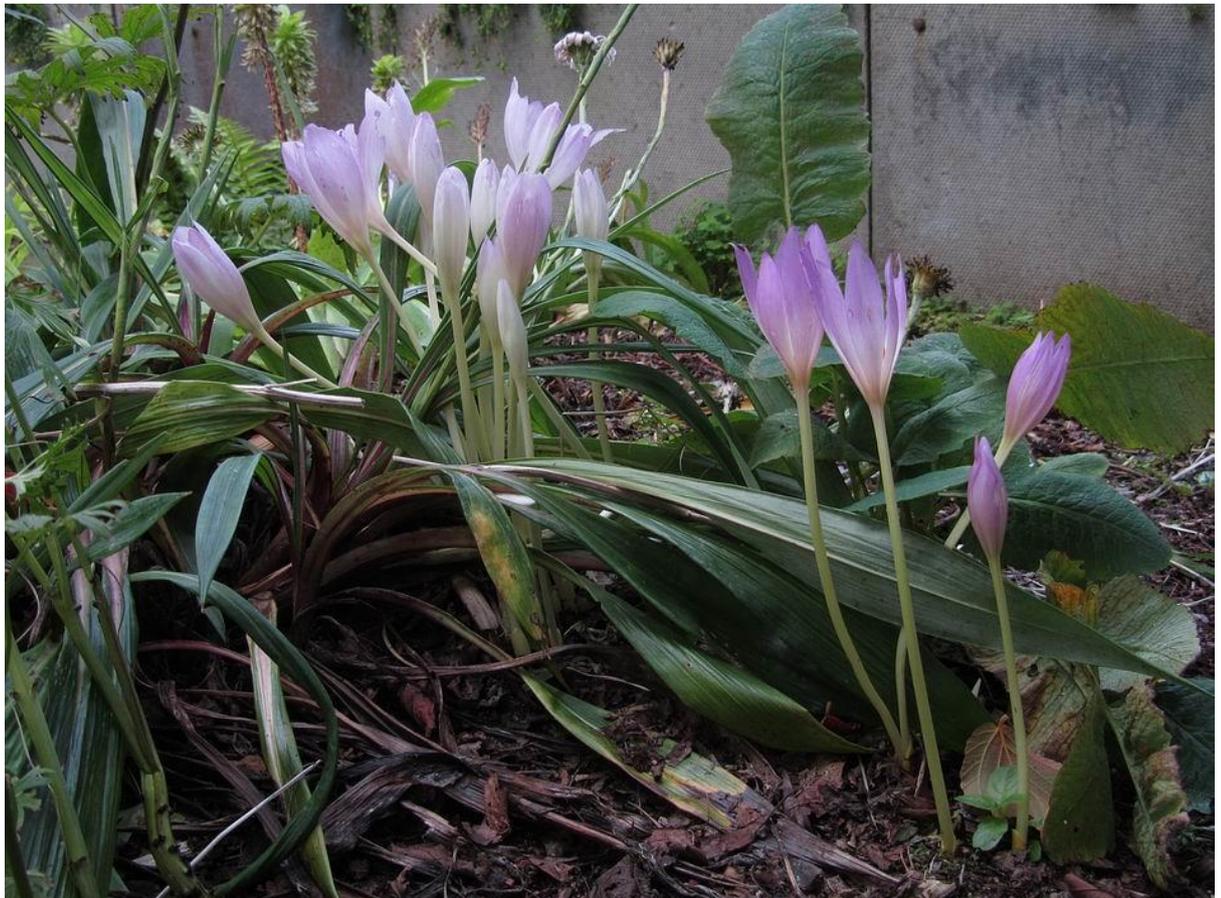
I washed as much of the compost off the roots as I could before plotting three into a gritty sand mixture these will sit by our front door, two directly into the sand bed in the bulbhouse, above, and the rest into the front garden. It is unlikely that those in the garden will survive long term but already we are enjoying some flowers.



While the commercial forms of Cyclamen make attractive flowering plants for our homes they do not possess the style and quality of the true species a few of which, such as **Cyclamen hederifolium**, will grow in our cold wet northern garden.

**Colchicum** flowers have a tendency to collapse in our stormy weather so growing them up through other plants can be an advantage.

The one thing to remember when choosing which plants to grow them with is that they have to make good companions in the spring when they are in leaf as well as in the autumn flowering season.





**Colchicum speciosum album** come into flower at the edge of the bulb bed.



The capacity of autumn flowering colchicum to fall over is nothing compared to some of the autumn flowering crocus and none more so than **Crocus nudiflorus albus**. This sand punge is mostly filled with mesh baskets of Erythronium but I also had a single basket of the the white **Crocus nudiflorus 'Orla'**.



**Crocus nudiflorus** is one of the species that send out stolons and 'Orla' had soon spread across most of the sand bed plus, in some years, I did not gather all the seeds so there are a number of seedlings only a few of which will be white.



Not content with colonising the sand plunge **Crocus nudiflorus** has made it across a narrow path to another erythronium plunge as well as into the gravel path.



A small percentage of the seedlings arising from 'Orla' do come white and we now have several white clones which are difficult to distinguish. There are slight variations in the width of the tepals and some including 'Orla' have a slight pink/purple colour when they first open then they turn pure white.



### **Crocus nudiflorus**

This *Crocus nudiflorus* is a seedling from the white form and unlike its parent it has a white style, all the white forms we grow have the typical orange coloured style. These two flowers of the same flower were taken a day apart and show that there have been enough insects around to transfer plenty pollen on the the stigma to continue the seeding process.



### **Crocus vallicola**

I love volunteer plants especially when they are *Crocus vallicola*. This one has seeded into this trough to join *Celmisia argentea* and an *Oxalis* which, while less welcome than the crocus, is doing no harm to the other plants,

## *Crocus vallicola*

Fortunately the attentions of the mice have not extended to the potted *Crocus* in the frames, partly because I protect each pot with a square of weld mesh before adding the gravel.



To improve the chance of getting some seed and to better enjoy some of the flowers I have temporarily moved two pots of *Crocus vallicola* into the frit-house.



It had been my intention to tip out this trough with **Sanguinaria canadensis** and **Galanthus nivalis** this year so I could rework the trough itself by painting it with PVA glue and sand as well as splitting the plants. However our cool moist summer has resulted in the Sanguinaria growing on - only losing its leaves now - so I am not sure if this will happen.



As many of the **Sanguinaria** rhizomes can be seen on the surface now, as well as a few Galanthus bulbs, I hope that I can find the time to do this.



I planted these **Crocus speciosus** and **Crocus nudiflorus** hoping that in time the **Leucogenes leontopodium** will spread out and the crocus will flower through the lovely silver foliage.



Despite the mouse attack we still have some **Crocus speciosus hybrids** growing in the sand: how many more we might have enjoyed if their corms had not been eaten.



I found this crocus corm lying on the surface and it was only when I picked it up to plant it that I discovered that it had been eaten hollow with just the outside remaining.



**Hollowed (eaten) out Crocus corm.**



Nature has a way of teaching us how we should be growing plants - as I was coming back in from the garden my eye was drawn to a *Crocus nudiflorus albus* flower rising up through and perfectly supported by the foliage of chives and Bowles Golden Grass. This is a somewhat neglected pot of chives into which the grass has seeded – I have no idea how the Crocus got in there. Like some of the other naturalistic pots I showed in [Bulb Log 2015](#) I just love this kind of natural planting. See more of the Crocus, Colchicum and Cyclamen on the latest [Bulb Log video diary supplement](#).