



BULB LOG 30.....27th July 2016





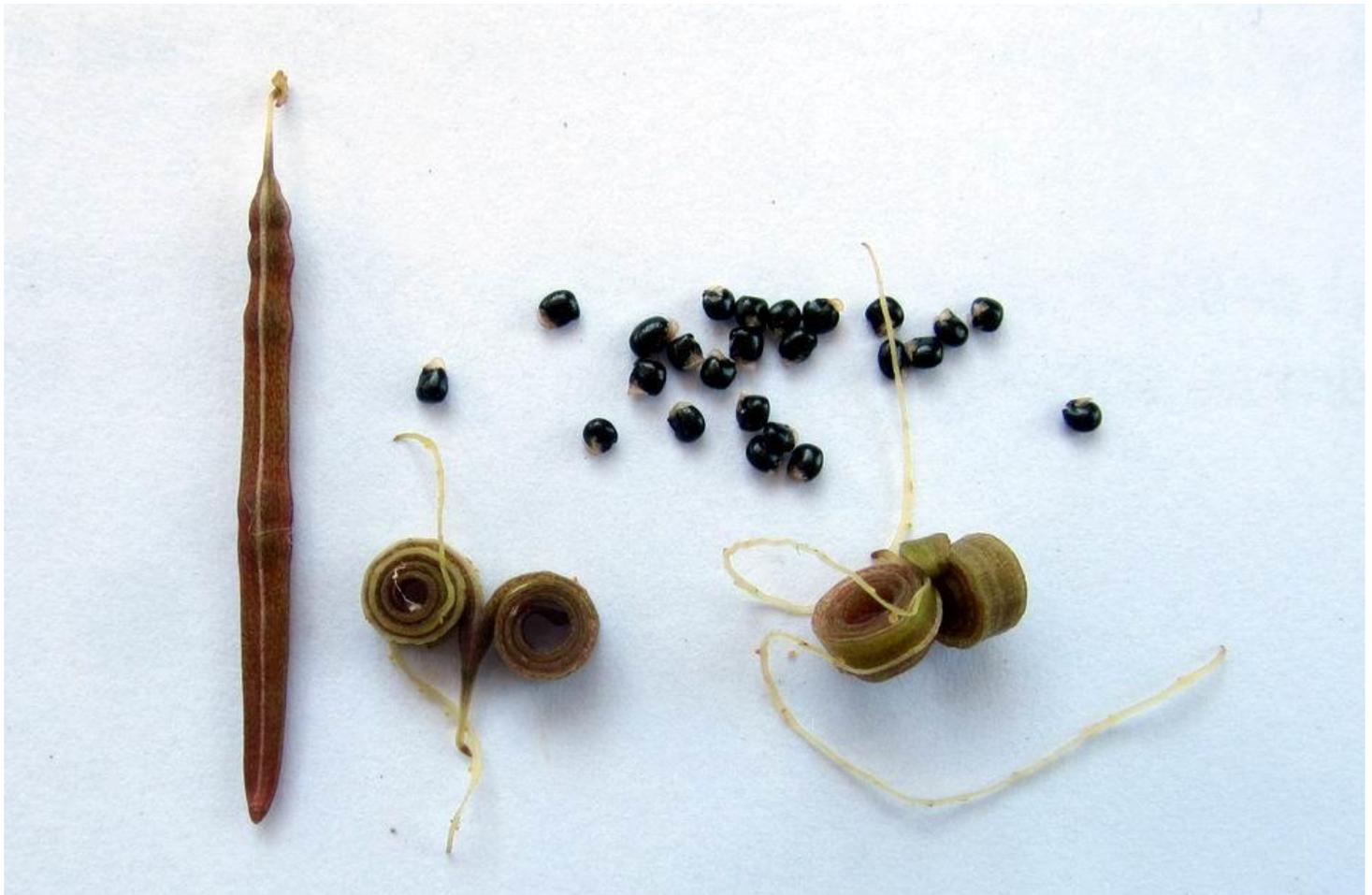
Allium prattii, photographed before I left for Alaska, was in full flower-when I returned two weeks later I find that most of the flowers have past and the seed is starting to form. When you are in the garden every day changes seem slow and many go unnoticed however being away for two weeks I see an incredible amount of change fuelled by the warmth and plenty moisture. Allium prattii seeds gently around which I encourage as it adds to the natural feel I

seek to achieve. You can also see the many ripe seed pods of Erythroniums which are also left to shed their contents naturally.

The majority of the plants in our garden arrived as seeds and many, mostly bulbous, types, we started out in pots. This is another Allium, this one came as seed from Turkey, it flowered for the first time this year but I still do not know the species. It has hairy leaves and is probably a bit tall to grow in pots but I am not sure if it will be fully hardy in our garden – it is not the cold of winter that I fear but our wet summers -these see the death of more plants and bulbs which have evolved to survive hot dry summer conditions. One of the advantages of growing from seed is that we will normally have a number of bulbs



allowing us to try at least one outside to test its tolerance of our conditions.



***Corydalis pseudobarbiseepala* seed**

It can be tricky collecting *Corydalis* seed because their capsules are ‘explosive’ - one minute they seem unready to give up their precious contents then the next the capsule splits, recoiling like a spring scattering the seeds. I check them regularly by rubbing my hand up the stem which can trigger the release of ripe pods so I try to catch any seeds released. I could remove the pods before they have sprung and open them manually – interestingly they lose the recoil spring once removed from the plant and I have to split the capsules. The seed is ripe before the capsules open – or I should say it is ready to be parted from the parent. The ripening process continues within the seed for 4 to 6 weeks after it is shed which is why you should never place freshly collected bulbous seeds in a fridge where the cool temperatures would slow or stop the ripening process. *Corydalis* seed is best sown immediately which is what I have done.



After I showed the *Trillium* with an old tea bag over the capsule to catch the seeds on a recent *Bulb Log* cover picture, my kind friend Christine Boulby, took pity on me and sent me a gift of some very nice little bags which are perfect for collecting the seeds.



Narcissus bulbs

My intention on arriving back home was to immediately start into lifting and replanting all the Erythronium plunge baskets but unfortunately the weather has not been playing its part as each day heavy rain showers have made the baskets too wet to handle easily. I do hope, weather permitting, to get into them this week but fear that with the wet conditions roots may already be starting to form, so for now I am working through the pots of bulbs under glass.



I spent years playing with potting mixes trying to get the perfect formula for the bulbs and our growing conditions before arriving at a formula of roughly equal parts of gravel, loam and leaf mould – that mix worked well until I ran out of loam so I simply replaced the loam part with sharp sand. The pot of Narcissus bulbs above were small spare small offsets I was left with last year so having no potting mix ready I tipped them into a pot of sharp sand and added a bit of bone meal. They have had the same additional feeding regime as the other pots and as you can see they

have grown perfectly well – which confirms my belief that gardeners are more concerned about potting mediums than the plants are – as long as the basic balance between drainage and moisture retention are met, almost any potting mix formula will do.



Narcissus bulbs

I have replanted the largest of these bulbs back into the same sharp sand to which I have added a sprinkling of bone meal and I will continue to assess their progress.



Tropaeolum tricolorum

Sometimes you know from the distortion of the plastic pot that your bulbs have grown well – it is incredible how many individual tubers were in this pot – there is no way I could get them all back in.



Tropaeolum tricolorum

I have selected a few to show how they increase by forming chains of offsets connected by a thin root with some tubers being roughly spherical others form amazing free form elongated shapes – every single one, no matter what size, will produce a flowering plant next year.



Asphodelus acaulis

Tipping off the gravel top-dressing reveals how I plant Asphodelus acaulis - leaving the top well clear of the potting mix to prevent rotting around the growth buds. You can see its beautiful flowers in [Bulb Log 1713](#).



The fat storage roots need to be handled carefully to avoid breaking them off and as you look carefully you will notice the dried remains of last year's roots can be seen clustered in the middle of the of new roots.

I carefully remove these old, now-dead roots, shown on the right of this picture, to prevent them from rotting which could pass on to and damage the new growth.

I also cut back the dried-out remains of the leaves which reveals the growth buds.

Then I replant the roots filling the pots with potting mix so it comes just below the point where the roots join together then top off with a deep layer of gravel.



The potting mix will come up to just below the step rim of this pot.





Ornithogalum pyrenaicum

I love handling bulbs: I often say that nature hides the most interesting parts of these plants underground. This is the first time I have re-potted this pot of *Ornithogalum pyrenaicum* since I sowed the seeds in 2014 – the elongated shape of the young bulbs indicates to me that they are looking to be planted deeper than they are.



On the left is the seed pot with the potting mix removed to reveal the cluster of bulbs almost at the bottom of this 7cm pot, as they want more depth I will re-pot them into a deeper version where I hope they will be happy. The red line indicates the depth they were at and the depth I have planted them in the new deeper pot.



One of my pot plantings as if plucked from the 'wild' with a fern, a Pseudocorydalis and a wild Geranium – I love this type of association.



Geranium sanguineum

The first flowers that greeted me as I arrived home were of Geranium sanguineum growing in our front drives.



Drive-way

Every single plant in our drive-ways was grown initially by me scattering seeds then allowing them to self-seed.



The drives are at the peak of the summer display and draw much attention from neighbours and passers-by, interestingly the Geranium has a very efficient catapult action that throws the seeds some distance and we see plants have established in our adjacent neighbours.





Front garden

Every time I visit wild habitats it reinforces my desire to continue with this wild naturalistic style of planting where many plants form a supportive community. Some plants are better at seeding around than others and we sometimes do cut off the seed heads of any that would tend to dominate and take over.





Podophyllum leaves, Corydalis 'Craigton Blue' and Dactylorhiza combine into a lovely contrasting arrangement of colours and shapes.





Similar scenes can be seen in the back garden.



Dactylorhiza seed around the garden many appearing in troughs like these – at this time of year this is one of my favourite troughs -again I see it is if a small part of nature had been lifted and placed in the simple concrete trough.



Another group of *Dactylorhiza* self-seeded into this trough – in fact at times there have been so many growing in this particular trough that we had to remove some to plant elsewhere in the garden.



Once more many of the plants in this picture have self-seeded into a bed that is also full of spring flowering bulbs extending the flowering interest over many months of the year. The plants growing now also help use up the moisture preventing the resting bulbs from becoming too wet while they are not actively growing.



Plants like these Aconitums seed freely - allowing them to spread around a number of beds links different areas of the garden together and reminds me of how I see plants in the wild woodlands where there are populations of plants scattered over an area, not single large clumps. The Aconitums produce a lot of seed so we will remove the stems as the flowers fade to prevent them taking over completely.



Another of the main spring flowering beds looks very different now with the taller plants such as Arisaema and Dactylorhiza featuring - these plants were all still underground when the Corydalis, Galanthus, Erythroniums etc were in full flower in February, March and April.



Lilium martagon

One of many variations of *Lilium martagon* rising up among the decorative *Rhododendron* foliage.

**Mutisia oligidon
hybrid**

The beautiful hybrid of the South American 'climbing daisy' *Mutisia oligidon* produces endless numbers of large pink flowers all the way through until the frosts of early winter arrive.



Saxifraga longifolia

I had been hoping for seed set on our last plant of *Saxifraga longifolia* which was in full flower when I left for Alaska – unfortunately it could not tolerate two weeks of pretty wet weather. This reinforces the point I made earlier that we lose more plants in what passes for summer in Aberdeen than we do in our winters widening the scope of what we need to consider when discussing the hardiness of a plant. Being monocarpic this plant would have died after flowering anyway but our cool wet weather prevented it from setting any seeds.



The troughs and raised slab beds – you can just make out the now dead saxifrage in the slab bed on the right – the one on the left causes me much anguish earlier in the year when it looks very bare.



It is hard to imagine it bare when it has completely greened over now - the problem is that most of the plants currently in growth are herbaceous or deciduous so in the winter and spring there is nothing to see. I do not know why it has taken me so long to work out the solution which is to fill it with small early flowering bulbs which will give me the colour and interest I want early in the year and will have retreated underground when this summer growth appears.



A new plant to our garden is **Silene compacta** raised from seed ex Gothenburg Botanic Garden – thank you.



You can see a scattering of the same Aconitum I showed a few pictures ago drifting across the beds in the background of this view of troughs.



I will leave you this week with a group of **Primula vialii** growing in the front garden.....