



BULB LOG 45..... 9th November, 2016



The cover image typifies autumn in the garden - as the last flowers fade the late seed pods race to ripen before the onset of winter. To be fair, **Eucomis bicolor** is a long way from Lesotho and Swaziland in South Africa, its native home: our climate in Aberdeen is so very different to that of its native land we rarely get seed to set. In the springtime colour in the garden gradually builds up - the first appearance is from the early bulbous species as their flowers emerge then growth gradually accelerates as we head into summer then autumn once more sees our Aberdeen garden being stripped back to the bare bones or structure.



In garden design and layout the structural elements are the most important - these are the permanent features be they slab beds, troughs or other hard structures along with trees and shrubs that shape the space in the garden and stop it from being a flat, uninteresting space in the winter. The troughs and slab beds are excellent structural elements in our garden – they work as a part of the garden structure as well as being entities in themselves.



The fallen Sorbus leaves that cover these troughs and beds will have to be removed as the small alpine plants dislike being covered in wet leaves for any length of time.



In recent Bulb Logs I have been sharing my fascination and love for the colours and shapes of the fallen leaves but it does not take long from them to turn from being a beautiful red carpet to an unpleasant soggy mess that needs lifting.

I use a garden leaf sucker/blower to lift some of the leaves. The lifting action of machine works well when the leaves are dry when it also partially shreds the bigger leaves as it collects them. Once the leaves are wet it is useless on suck but can still be helpful in blowing the leaves into heaps where I can lift them manually and take them to the leafmould heaps.





I do not regard lifting leaves as just a tedious task of tidying up the garden but as a harvest of a valuable crop that will mature into one of the best forms of humus for potting mixes and soil conditioning. The majority of our trees are Acer, Betula, Cotoneaster and Sorbus, which have smaller leaves so they break down quite quickly and I have used leaf mould

collected in the autumn in potting mixes the following summer. The leaf pile above is one year old and has broken down into a semi leaf soil – the pile below is two years old and is full of mycelium with fungi fruiting showing how much benefit leaf mould brings to the soil.

Many people are too tidy in their gardens cutting back the herbaceous growth and lifting the leaves as soon as they fall. All this material is then often removed from the garden in a “green bin” - this is stripping the garden of the natural goodness and their soils will become increasingly depleted in



the essential humus. It is the rotting vegetable matter that feeds the micro-organisms, flora and fauna in the soil they break it down releasing minerals and nutrients that the plants can absorb. No amount of chemical fertiliser can make up for the loss of the organic component.



As I removed the dried stems of the *Dactylorhiza* in the slab beds I shook them about the troughs to ensure any remaining seed was released. As I pulled them away I noticed the green shoots promising a good flowering again next year.



More *Dactylorhiza* stems need to be removed from this trough with Silver Saxifrage where they had self-seeded. I will scatter any remaining seed around other areas where we might like orchids to grow and so encourage this process of naturalisation.



Depending on the planting many troughs will retain interest all through the winter and saxifrages are among the best plants as this one with a saxifrage hybrid and *Saxifraga brunonis* and the previous troughs show.



Saxifraga brunonis has migrated into the adjacent *Campanula* trough by means of the freely produced runners that jumped the gap placing plantlets up to 30cms away from the parent.



Much of the season can be seen in this image with the rocky landscape of a slab bed, an evergreen bonsai conifer and the bright red leaves of an Acer shedding in the background.



In a corner of the rock garden flowers of *Colchicum agrippinum* and *Crocus banaticus* emerge through fallen leaves with the evergreen rosettes of *Ramonda*, *Haberlea* and a dwarf *Aciphylla*. The *Hepatica* leaves will also survive the winter but I will cut them off in late winter just before the flowers emerge by which time they will be showing the scars of a winter.



A group of ***Crocus pulchellus*** that have self-seeded into the gravel path



**Crocus
banaticus**

Despite the predation of the mice there are still some crocus left in the sand bed that I recently covered in cobble sized stones in an attempt to deter the mice. Due to the cold wet weather this patch has never opened its flowers.



One of the reasons that we grow bulbs under glass is to be able to enjoy the flowers, like this **Crocus banaticus**.

It is essential that we remove the Crocus flowers as soon as they collapse to prevent them becoming infected with grey moulds. The grey mould can quickly transfer down to the corm and also to the emerging leaves as you can see here the flowers have fallen onto adjacent pots with new Narcissus leaves which can also become damaged by mould.



Crocus laevigatus



Crocus laevigatus



Crocus laevigatus



Because I like to see the variations I much prefer a pot of seedlings like these **Crocus laevigatus**.



Crocus caspius

I have never observed any significant variation in any of the *Crocus caspius* seedlings that we have raised.



**Crocus ochroleucus
albus**

Crocus ochroleucus albus on the left has a pure white flower without the yellow throat or tube of the type species shown below.



Crocus ochroleucus



***Crocus pallasii*
var. *homeri***

The *homeri* form of *Crocus pallasii* is characterised by a lovely dark coloured throat and tube making it among the most desirable of this beautiful genus. Each mature corm will send up a number of flowers we have had five from a single corm.





Crocus goulimyii albus



Crocus goulimyii



C. goulimyii 'Sofia Agia' MJ9562



A nice selection from *Crocus goulimyii* including the lovely dark form introduced by Melvyn Jope and named '**Sofia Agia**' after the church on Monemvasia near to the place where the original plant was found.



Crocus speciosus detail



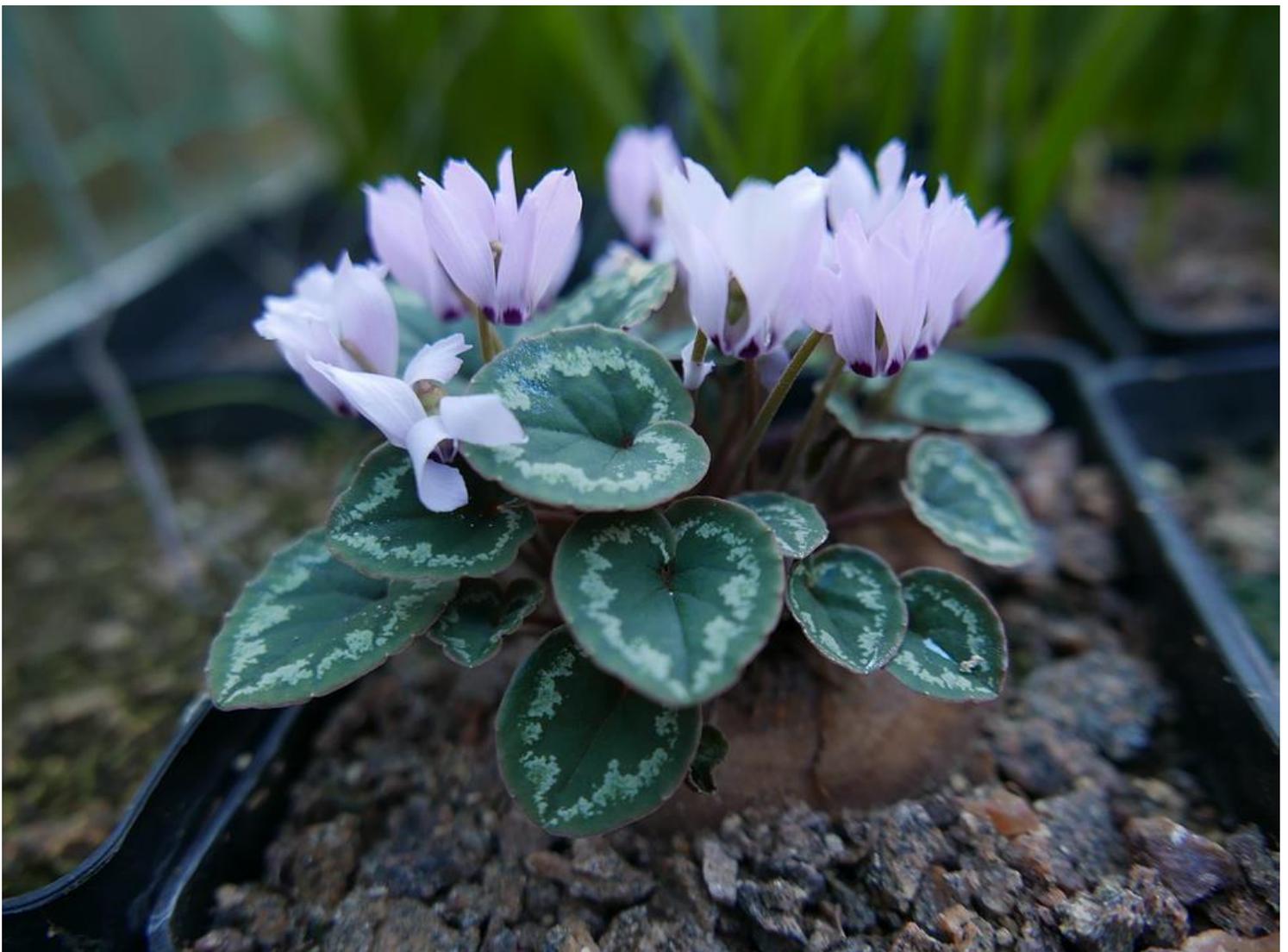
I showed **Scilla lingulata** a few weeks ago when the first flowers opened and I am interested to see that their stems have now bent over, see below, while those more recently opened remain upright. As there is plenty of moisture available I see no reason why this should be and must watch to see if it happens in all the plants.



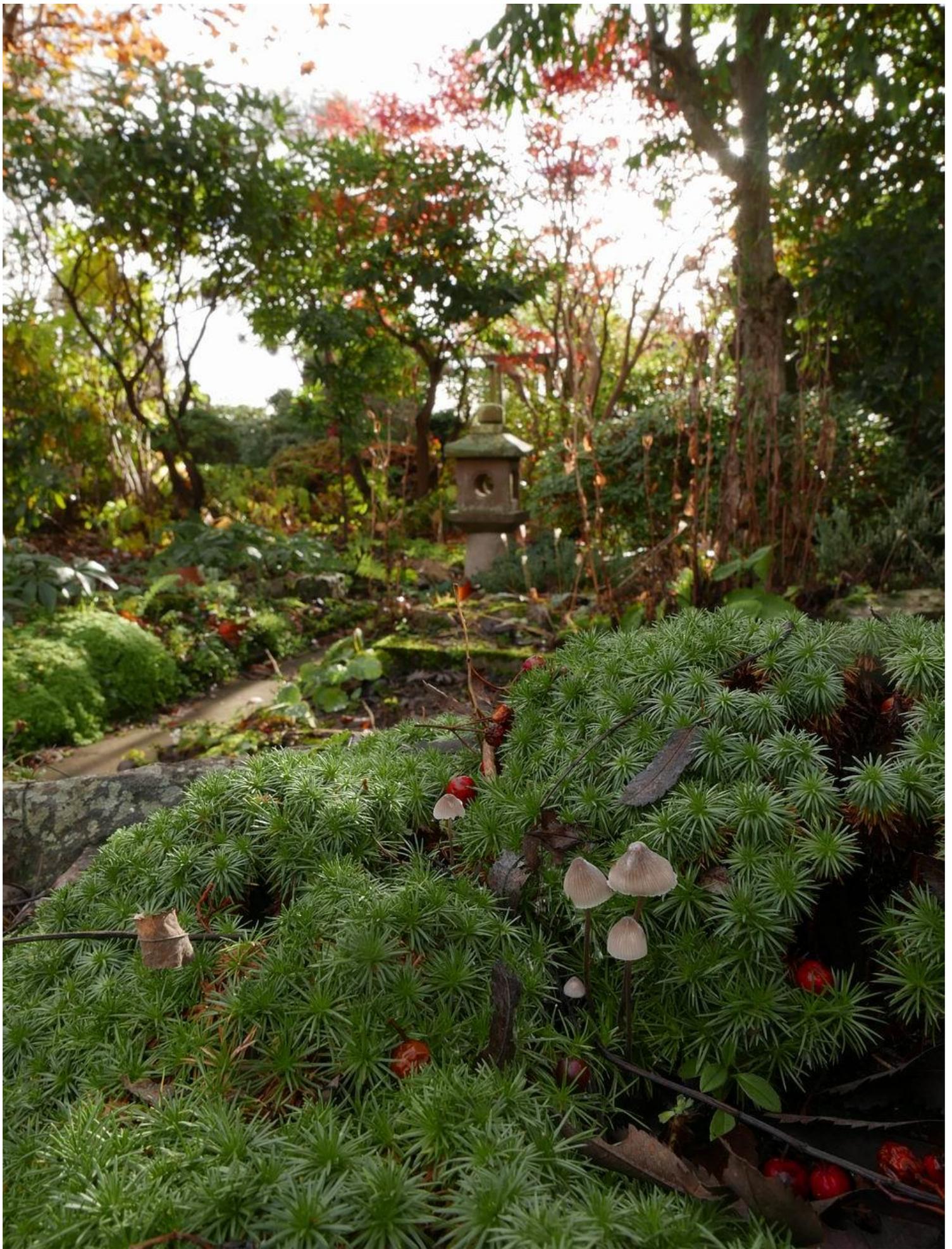
While I call this *Scilla lingulata* you may also see it under the synonym of *Hyacinthoides lingulata* –in fact under [Kew's plant list of working species](#) there are nine synonyms for this plant.



One of the other Crocus flowering in the sand has dark anthers. As I have no labels in the sand bed it is challenging my memory and identification – I think this is **Crocus wattiorum**, any other opinions are warmly welcomed.



Cyclamen mirabile



My parting shot for this week is another that sums up the autumn garden with some fungi growing through a dwarf form of Armeria on a slab bed to the turning leaves beyond.....