



SRGC

---- Bulb Log Diary ----

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This week I was greatly saddened by the news that Leonard Cohen had died – I have enjoyed and been inspired by his songs since 1968 when his first LP was released. It is still in our collection today and two weeks ago I bought and have been listening to ‘You Want It Darker’- his last release.

We are all a lot older now but my interests in Art, Music and Plants has remained with me since then. In 2014 my old school held a 45 reunion of my year leaving school. On the way to the reunion I diverted into HMV where I bought two recently released CD’s and slipped them into my jacket pocket as I walked down the drive towards to old school building I reflected on walking down that same drive all those years ago with LP’s under my arm what struck me was the two CD’s I bought were by exactly the same artists as some of the LP’s - Leonard Cohen and Robert Plant.

To me gardening and art are one and the same thing - they share a similar process with the main difference being the garden is in a constant state of flux with the seasonal changes and plant growth. When I make an artwork I take inspiration from what I see around me then try and capture my impression of the experience using a wide range of materials, often found and recycled. This week’s cover is an experimental mixed media work using leafmould as one of the materials in which I try and create an expression of the garden - this is also what I do in the garden where I try and capture moments from nature that have inspired me. I often make mistakes in my art works some of these I may like and choose to leave, others I scrub out or work over resulting in a work that has multiple layers with traces of the earlier marks and this is exactly the same process that I go through in the garden. Through the years my art has been moulded and refined as my knowledge and understanding of the subjects and materials develops just as in the garden.

At the moment I am reworking and revising my talk ‘Nature Gardener’s Tutor’ which looks at how I try to interpret what I like in nature and how I use it in the garden and many of the pictures this week are from that talk.



In the mid 1970’s the garden looked very different to how it looks now for a start we were still growing fruit and vegetables in a sectioned off area at the southern end. Here I am around this time of year burning some of the debris and you will notice that in those days it was spaniels that we kept as pets.



This old view from a back window shows the early layout of the garden with the fruit and vegetable section to the top with some of our early attempts at rock gardens spaced in the grass – can you spot Maggi? The large hedge to the right separated us from our neighbour's garden which you just get a glimpse of in the top right of the picture showing just bare dug earth that was the extent of their garden - no plants. In 1985 we bought the house next door and removed the hedge, doubling the size of our garden. By then we were starting to gain knowledge and an understanding of how we wanted our garden to evolve.

Below is a similar view of the garden in around 1987 with the hedge removed and all the hard landscaping done.





It is commonly written and said that a lawn is essential in a garden to 'set off the plants' - I disagree - lawn grass is the most boring plant in the garden which requires the most amount of work to maintain it.





For years Maggi spent hours mowing the grass and cutting the edges until we decided it was not necessary. We lifted all the grass and replaced it with gravel.



This was the newly laid gravel before the plants started to seed in.



These two pictures show how the plants have populated the gravel and I leave it to you to decide if you prefer the lawn or the more recent version.





Slab beds in the late 1980's – early 1990's

The development and alterations in the garden are driven by two key factors first my changing knowledge and experiences and secondly the growth of the plants especially that of the larger trees and shrubs. My early plantings of the slab beds and troughs were based on what I read in books and journals but through the years I have increasingly taken my lessons from nature as I try and create more naturalistic plantings and habitats in the garden.





At the time I was pleased with my first slab bed planting but now looking back I think it is terribly boring and artificial looking – compare it to the more recent naturalistic planting below.



Notice how I have used the landscaping to create height so the planting area starts at the top edge of the slabs where in the earliest version the planting stopped and inch or two below the top edge.



These are the very first fish box troughs that I developed in the 1980's to enable me to put on a display of troughs at the annual gardening show in Aberdeen – the theme of these troughs was Scottish native plants in habitat - above is the seaside one and below a woodland edge planting.





Later versions included this one planted with silver foliage plants from New Zealand – if I were planting this today I would be creating more height in the landscaping.



Some years after making the trough I got to visit New Zealand and see the real thing.



Above is *Leptinella atrata* growing wild in New Zealand and below my impression of it in one of our troughs.





Closer to home I can learn from nature on the cliffs by the seaside with my interpretation in the foreground of the slab beds below.





It was our love of seeing *Dactylorhiza* orchids in the wild that encouraged me to try create a similar scene within the confines of the garden and troughs.





Nature has also taught me to appreciate all her beauties - not just the rarities like *Meconopsis delavayii* but also *Taraxacum officinalis* below – it is also a beautiful plant.





Taraxacum officinalis, the Dandelion, is a very adaptable plant and is perfectly happy growing in an extrem rocks environment as I show above.

I have grown this specimen in the slab bed for around twenty years and I never let it set seed.

Each flower lasts a day so when it is in flower I remove all the previous day's flowers so they do not seed – this also encourages the plant to produce more flowers and when it is in season I can easily remove twenty to thirty flowers a day for a couple of weeks.



Another inspiration I take from nature is the carpeting effect of plants with one species creating a framework that others can grow through creating wonderful tapestries of colour and texture such as a wood in Shetland above and our front garden below.





And so over the years I have tried to create impressions of nature in our garden – with many different habitats that can be viewed separately or combined into a landscape within the confines of our garden.





As my art has evolved and improved to my satisfaction over the years so has the garden but there is still the problem of the slugs and snails!