



BULB LOG 43.....26th October 2016



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Last week I featured autumn colours in the garden - this week I am sharing what is interesting me in the bulb houses. On the cover is **Crocus speciosus**, with a side view on the left. This is one of the best crocuses for establishing in the garden and we do have a number of forms growing outside but I always like to keep some in the bulb house where both the plant and I can enjoy some protection from the weather. If you are very observant you will have noticed something unusual about the Crocus flower on the cover - instead of having three inner and three outer segments there are four of each.

Flowers will often produce extra parts like this but it is rarely a fixed feature - the flowers will more than likely return to a normal look next year.



I often find self-sown seedlings in the pots that have not been replanted every year - as you can see where a *Crocus kotschyanus* has seeded into the pot of *Cyclamen mirabile*.



I originally received this plant as *Crocus pulchellus* albus but believe that it is most likely to be a garden hybrid possibly also involving *Crocus speciosus* – it is however an excellent plant that increases well and we grow it both under glass and in the garden.



Similar plants are offered under the name of *Crocus* 'Zephyr' and all are great additions to the autumn garden.



Crocus kotschyanus and the **Crocus pulchellus albus** discussed above.



Crocus pulchellus

and



Crocus kotschyanus

Crocus pulchellus and Crocus kotschyanus are superficially similar and the best way to tell them apart using the flowers is that the yellow centre of Crocus kotschyanus is topped by a deeper 'V' shape, also note that the stigmas branch in different ways.



Crocus kotschyanus seeds well with each seedling having a variation of the colour theme some like this one are quite pale while others can be darker in colour – all will retain the golden yellow 'V' pattern in the centre.



Crocus kotschyanus

You will notice that most of these Crocus are flowering before the leaves appear and this is a good indicator that while we need to keep the potting mix moist, we should not over water them. I water in proportion to the amount of leaf growth. When the leaves start to emerge and grow then we should make sure they have sufficient water to fuel that growth as well as water loss through transpiration.



7cm pot plunge



It is inevitable that labels will get lost and I have a number of pots such as this pot of crocus where the original label got lost so I need to identify the plants when they come into flower, here it is easy as this is **Crocus kotschyanus**.



When it comes to pots of seedlings the label states the seed parent however I cannot always be sure of the pollen parent especially with seed from our own plants where so many species are growing close together and may hybridise.



Both this pot of *Crocus* and the one above were seed raised from *Crocus speciosus xantholaimos* but from the white pollen I can tell all the flowers above are hybrids while the pot on the right is a mixture of the true species with one hybrid mixed in.



Crocus longiflorus differs from the previous species in that the leaves grow with the flowers so it gets more watering at this early stage to enable and support this growth.



Seed raised **Crocus longiflorus** will display some variation as shown in this pot.



The leaves of **Crocus goulmyi** also grow as it flowers.



I had a 7cm pot of seedling Crocus for which I had lost the label and now it has flowered I can confirm that it is **Crocus mathewii**. I decided to carefully knock them out of the pot so I could replant them into one of my new bulb house plunges which I converted to sand beds.



Crocus mathewii

I always take photographs of the plants and bulbs for my records especially when I handle bulbs in growth.



Cyclamen mirabile



Cyclamen mirabile

I am sharing two pictures of the same plant taken seconds apart to illustrate how the camera settings can change the image. The image above was taken using the fully automatic setting where the camera makes all the decisions all I have to do is point it in the right direction - compare that to the one below where I switched to manual mode where I selected the aperture and shutter speed and hence the exposure.





Auto-focus systems on cameras can be very useful however they have their limitations. They work by searching for area(s) of contrast and then sharpening the margins however they do not always see your chosen subject even though it is right in front of them, especially when it is white with low contrast. Above: everything in the image is in reasonably sharp focus except my subject.



Switching to manual focus allows me to focus on the white ***Galanthus reginae-olgae***.



Another method I often use, which is useful if your camera does not have a manual focus option, is to place my finger next to the flower I want to focus on then push the button half way down so the camera focuses, while holding the button remove the finger then push the button all the way down to capture the image. On this occasion I left my finger in to show how small this snowdrop is.



Sternbergia leaves are growing strongly and will need plenty of water especially on sunny days - also it is time I added some more feeding in the form of liquid tomato fertiliser at half the recommended strength.



Leaf growth of many plants in the sand bed is quite advanced and I have to ensure that it is also sufficiently well-watered. One of the many advantages of growing this way can be seen in this picture where you can see that the surface of the sand is dry so the tops of the plants can be warm and dry while there is plenty of moisture available for their roots.



Second years seedlings of **Cyclamen mirabile** – most still have a single leaf but this one has four leaves.



There is not so much growth appearing yet in this newer sand bed largely because it is mostly Fritillaria – however I have added a few crocuses and I will add more bulbs to add to the autumn interest. One problem with the moist sand is it will attract moss so I regularly rake it gently with a fork or other implement which inhibits this growth.



There is however plenty of growth and flowers appearing in the sand bed I started the other year.



Sternbergia lutea flowering for the second year in succession.



Scilla lingulata



Crocus kotschyanus*, *Scilla lingulata* and *Galanthus reginae-olgae

More from the garden next week.....