



SRGC

Bulb Log Diary

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BULB LOG 51.....20th December 2017

Driveway planting special.





The freezing weather continues to prevent me from working in the garden so this week I decided to bring together some pictures of part of the garden that attracts a lot of interest - our driveway planting. It was over thirty years ago when I was down on my hands and knees weeding the gravel areas between the slabs of our drive, a task I had been doing for years, that it suddenly dawned on me that this is a gravel bed why were we not using it?

On the left is our neighbours' drive and the pictures below are of our drive through the year - I know which I prefer.

As it was almost impossible to dig holes to plant into the gravel layer I decided to use the easy method of scattering seeds which is nature's way of planting and,

as long as you are patient, it works. There are many types of plants you could use and our selection was based on their height - they had to be low growing so as not to be harmed by cars parking on the drive. We started out by scattering seeds of *Geranium sanguineum* which after a few years became self-seeding colony which gave us superb colour through the summer months. As with the rest of the garden we wanted to get as near to year round interest as we can so I started to scatter seed of some of the bulbs and other plants that would extend the flowering season.



Crocus are among the first to flower and being on the colder north side of the house these start to flower in March or early April.

Forms and hybrids of *Crocus chrysanthus*, *vernus* and *tommasinianus* are all growing well providing early flowering.



***Crocus tommasinianus* and *vernus*.**

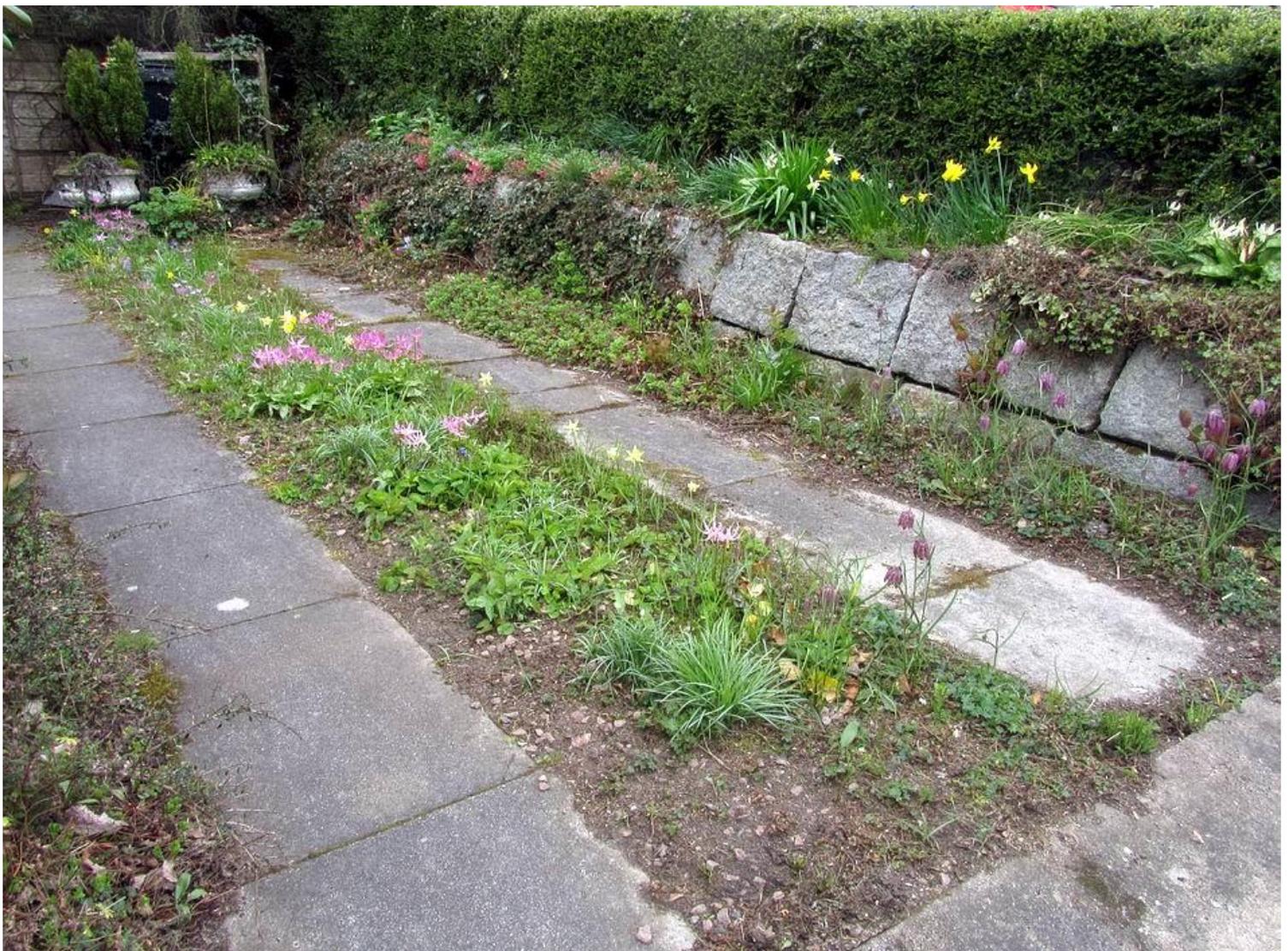


Anemone blanda is also now established and self-seeding also seed of *Eranthis hyemalis* has now started flowering to add to the early colour.



Early flowers

The growth picks up speed and intensity towards the middle of April when many more bulbous genera make an appearance as you will see in the picture below.



Narcissus, Erythronium and Fritillaria start to flower.



Also from seed are *Narcissus bulbocodium* and *Narcissus pallidiflorus*.

As well as the different types of *Narcissus* look carefully at the picture above and you will see masses of young growth, all of which will add to the colour when they reach flowering size in years to come.

Erythronium revolutum is an ideal subject and has been flowering and seeding here for ten or more years.





Snow is never far away in the early part of the year but these are all hardy plants evolved to cope with this weather and once the snow goes and the sun comes out the *Erythroniums* open their flowers.



Some of the *Erythronium revolutum* seedlings are now established enough to form clumps.



The Narcissus on top of the wall were planted there as bulbs but all the plants in the drive are from scattered seed.



Fritillaria meleagris has also formed a self-seeding colony.



Fritillaria meleagris

We needed to find a plant that would work to fill the gap in flowering between the early bulbs and the *Geranium sanguineum* which you will notice is just starting to come into leaf below the *Fritillaria*.



Phyteuma spicata has proved an ideal companion planting coming into growth just as the flowering of the bulbs has peaked and before the *Geranium* gets going.



Phyteuma spicata

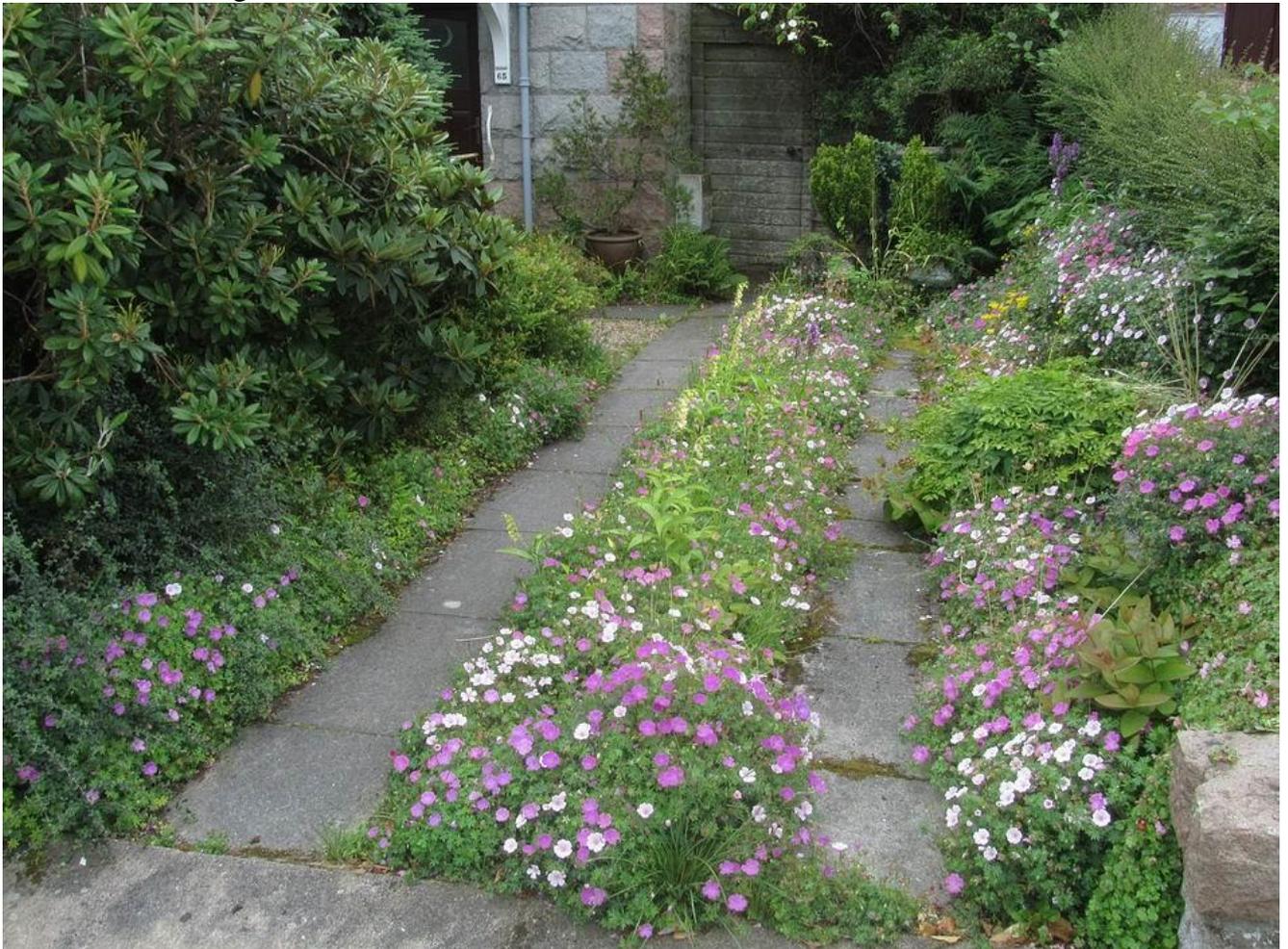
For a while the *Phyteuma spicata* dominates the planting their flowers providing both the interest we want and a source of food for the constant flight of bees that visit them. When the flower spikes turn brown we take hold of them and pull them off with a sharp sideways tug which removes them right down to the ground. This does not seem to harm them at all as every year we get more flowers.



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With the Phyteuma removed you can see that many of the bulbs are in fruit or have already shed their seed and now the Geraniums are coming into flower.





By July the planting is at its most colourful with the Geranium in full flower. I only ever scattered seeds on the gravel between the slabs but the explosive nature of the seed capsule ejects seeds a fair distance allowing them to establish along the wall, some even ended up over the hedge and now flower in the neighbour's garden.



Wall



Dactylorhiza garden hybrids have also seeded in and are thriving.



Geranium sanguineum





Digitalis grandiflora has also proved to work well among the other plants.



Drive way planting in mid July - the Geranium continue to flower through the summer along with various Sisyrinchium including the blue *S. angustifolium*.



By October it is getting late for most of the flowers but looking carefully you will see some colour appearing.



Crocus banaticus



I have sown **Crocus banaticus** along with other autumn flowering species such as *C. pulchellus* and *C. kotschyanus* all of which are flowering and seeding among the Geranium foliage.

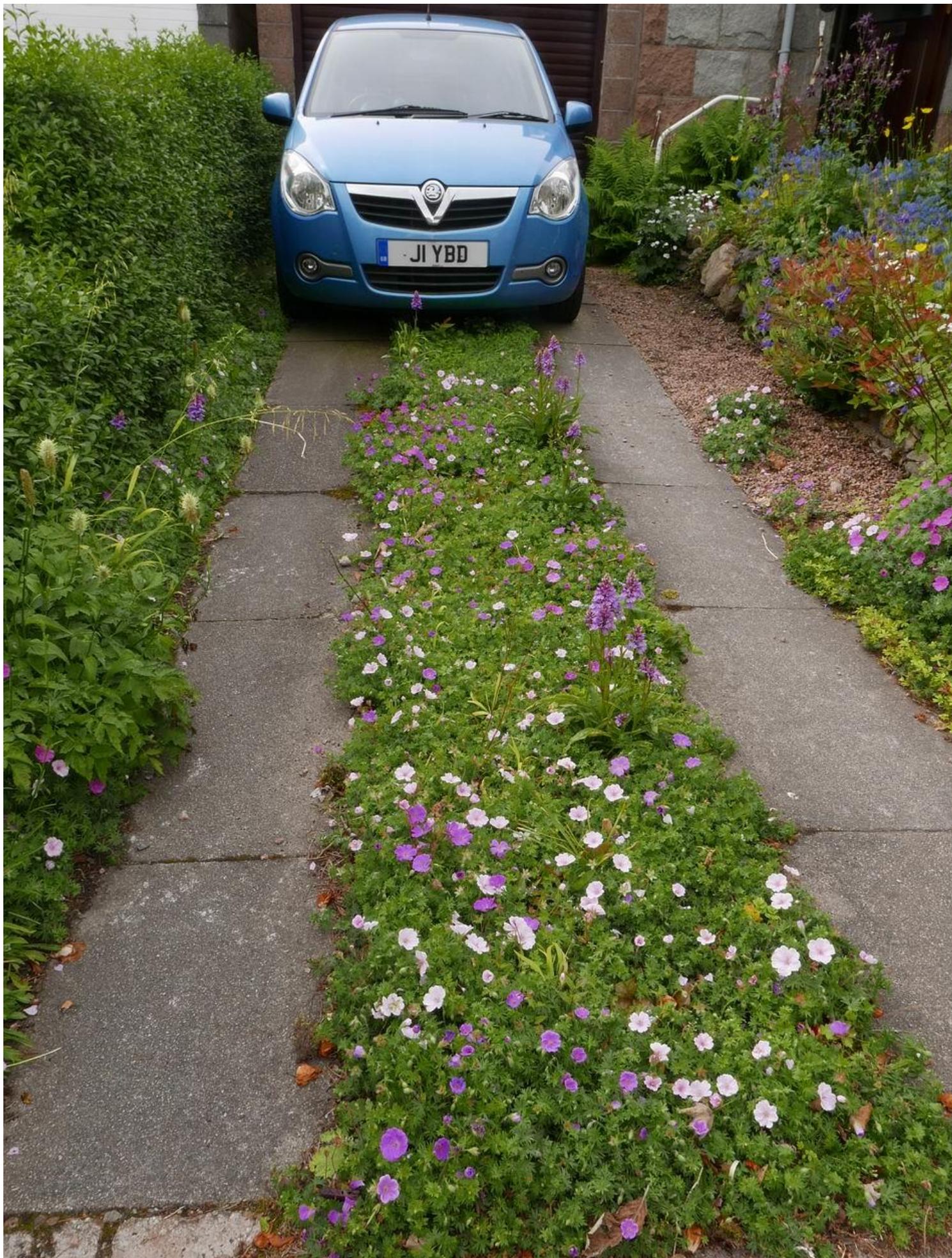


Towards the end of November the Geranium leaves take on an autumn colour as the plants disappear underground.



Now winter has taken over forcing all the growth underground, as soon as I get a suitable weather window I will clear off all the old growth and tidy any unwanted plants that have seeded in – there are a few Dandelions to be removed. There are many other combinations of plants that could be used – such as low growing alpines which would allow vehicles to pass over.

This is our spare drive so it is only occasionally used by cars however I keep my car on the other drive below.



East drive

My little car gets very little use so it sits there most of the time as a result nothing grows directly underneath where the light is blocked however with the exception of the taller growing *Digitalis* and *Phyteuma* all the same plants grow in front and are unharmed by the car passing over them.



Early in the year **Crocus tommasinianus** flowers at the base of the hedge, in the autumn we have **Crocus pulchellus**.



Crocus pulchellus



There is an element of Darwinian selection going on here as any taller growing *Dactylorhiza* get their flower heads knocked off by the car so only those with shorter stems get to seed.



The tall growing **Campanula persicifolia** is safe to grow by the hedge.



July/August is the time for the hedge to be cut -now you can see the bare area of gravel in front of the garage where the car usually sits. If your car is out all day and only parked at night the plants would grow – it is only because, apart for a few hours a week, our car sits there all the time blocking the light that prevents things growing.



***Crocus banaticus* and *Crocus pulchellus*.**



Geranium sanguineum and Dactylorhiza seedlings.

Keen gardeners never seem to have enough growing space so if you have a gravel drive you could have a wonderful opportunity for an extra bit of garden - all you need are some seeds and patience.....