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Bulb Log Diary

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BULB LOG 08..... 21st February 2018





It is only one week before the start of the meteorological spring, the astronomical spring begins on 20 March, but we are getting fleeting glimpses of spring colours in the brief spells of sunshine as revealed in the scene from our back doorstep.



Each day more of the bright yellow Eranthis buds are emerging and I am noticing that the first to appear are the younger plants flowering for the first time. Some of the older plants have still to appear above ground but all around the margin the self-sown seedlings are showing good colour. It could be that the seedlings are acclimatising to our garden conditions and so appearing early, it could be that the older plants are deeper in the ground or, like the gardener as he gets older, does not get up as early as he once did.



The first of the **Eranthis hyemalis** to almost open their flowers as the sunlight passed over them. It was only that extra warmth of being in direct sunshine that encouraged them to open they quickly closed again when in the shade.



While the name of *Crocus gargaricus herbertii*, changed to *Crocus herbertii* then to **Crocus thirkeanus**, the plant retains the same beautiful deep yellow flowers and its running habit means that it appears in many of our troughs where we have reused old potting compost. You will see more of this plant in the coming weeks.



Snowdrops also responded to the spells of sunshine by slightly reflexing their petals but it is not warm enough yet for them to open fully.



We have a number of clumps of **Galanthus woronowii** around the garden - many have resulted from splitting up previous clumps



Galanthus woronowii

The question of when is the best time to lift and divide Galanthus is always being debated and there is no question that it is best for the growth of the plant to do this when the bulb goes dormant with no root activity. However the best time for the gardener is when they remember. The clump above is just about the peak size for a clump where



each bulb can still get enough moisture and nutrients to achieve flowering size. A clump will quickly progress from perfect size to being congested when the competition between the bulbs becomes too intense and flowering diminishes and that is the situation with the clump shown on the left. Note a small group of seedlings in front.

I intended to split this clump two summers ago then again last year when it was dormant but out of sight is also out of mind and I forgot, so it is now at the stage where there are masses of leaves and only a few flowers.

There is no time like the present so I got a fork deep under the clump and gently prised it out and as our soil is open and sandy there was minimal damage to the roots. Because galanthus are true bulbs at worst the result of lifting in full growth is the loss of a season's bulb growth and possibly next year's flowers but the bulbs will survive.

In this case my decision was easy it would be detrimental to the growth of bulbs to leave them so congested for other year, while dividing them and carefully planting with more space should allow for better growth this season.



Galanthus woronowii

By handling them carefully and planting them out immediately the bulbs should grow on better than they would do if I had left them again. I expect it will take a couple of years before they get back to full flowering size.



The other week I mentioned how shrubs can slowly invade a space – again it is a case of the best time to do a job is when you remember. These two *Vaccinium numularia* shrubs had merged cutting out the planting space in the middle. I kept thinking I will enjoy the flowers then cut them back, then after flowering the new growth is also very attractive, that is followed by the berries in autumn so there is always a reason to put the task off so this year I have decided to do it now.



It is also time to cut back this **Cassiope wardii x fastigata** once more.

I will cut it right back to the ground and it will regrow with nice compact new growth.

I last did this in 2011 check out [Bulb Log 2111](#)



All around the garden there are decisions to be made and actions taken - here the stones that make up the raised wall are disappearing under moss and the growth of plants.

Regular readers will know of the pleasure I take from allowing natural growth, the Japanese have a name for this: Wabi-sabi.

At this end I will leave the moss on the rocks because the Rhododendrons seen here seeded into and are growing in the moss covering the rocks.





Further along the wall I have removed some of the moss so I can see the structure of the stones.



I also have to watch the growth of the shrubs on the top to assess if that growth will inhibit the many other plants that we grow there. It is a balancing act - bulbous plants should be able to grow through the low growth but if it starts to out-compete them I will take action.



Further along I will give some of the shrubs growing down the face a light trim.



One of those shrubs, *Leucopogon fraseri*, is currently flowering so I will trim it later.



I also need to watch the growth of other dwarf shrubs planted on the top as they slowly command more space. On the left is a natural *Phyllodoce* hybrid grown from Japanese seed which I will trim later in the year - I will place the cuttings into a mist unit to try and root them. On the right is *Trochocarpa thymifolia*, it is also in flower.



Trochocarpa thymifolia

This was a tiny plant when we put it in but slowly it has grown and now it takes up a relatively large amount of this small bed. I could move it but in our very densely planted garden I cannot think of another suitable location the other more likely option is to give it a good trim back and once more try and root some of the cuttings.



Trochocarpa thymifolia



The growths of this slow growing Yew spread out all the way to the ground, I have always trimmed back the longer growths but last autumn I cut it right back to reveal the trunk and stems. New growths are appearing and I need to decide if I keep trimming it to display the attractive twisted trunk or let it become a green cushion once more.



Another decision I have been putting off is splitting this large plant of **Haberlea rhodopensis**. In past years I have carefully pulled side rosettes complete with some root from around the sides – I immediately replanted these and they have grown to form good plants but now is the time for lifting.



Haberlea rhodopensis
Once lifted I can see just how large a plant it has become.



Haberlea rhodopensis is one of a number of plants whose roots grow in the humus formed from its own old leaves. The old woody stems are deep down with no root growth at all - the active roots are near the surface growing among the old decaying leaves so it is easy to pull the clump apart, like opening up a book.



I replanted some of the divisions back into the original space with some fresh leafmould and gravel – now what to do with the rest of the divisions?



Something, probably mice, have been digging into the gaps between the stones of this raised bed, you can see the excavated soil along the bottom of the wall.



One hole was quite deep offering me a timely opportunity.



Haberlea rhodopensis grows very well in walls like this so I have plugged the gaps with some of the spare plants.



Wall showing new planting of **Haberlea rhodopensis** divisions.



Reticulate Irises continue to open in our narrow 'Hot Bed' while ever more bulbs flower in the bulb houses.



Narcissus and *Crocus angustifolius*



Fririllaria chitralensis buds are now well through in the sand bed.



Narcissus are still the dominant flowering plants under glass.



Random planning of bulbs in the sand beds produces mixed colours and forms of Narcissus.



I will leave you with this beautiful cluster of Narcissus flowers slowly opening.