SRGC ----- Bulb Log Diary ----- ISSN 2514-6114

BULB LOG 44.....31st October 2018

With the sun getting lower in the sky and the temperature falling to the extent that we have had the first frosts, the various forms of **Roscoea purpurea** have finally stopped flowering but before they slip back down to their underground retreat they deliver yet another blaze of colour as the leaves turn from green to a deep warm yellow, contrasting beautifully with the red/purple stems.

The bright red colour of these **Podophyllum hexandrum** fruits indicate they are fully ripe and are already attracting the grazing attention of the garden fauna so I would be wise to collect and disperse the seeds.

Eucomis autumnalis ssp. amaryllifolius is not hardy enough to survive planted out in our garden however I can keep it going by growing it in pots. Last week I moved these pots back under glass where they will be allowed to dry out and they will not be watered again until I see next year's shoots pushing through the surface. There is one more task to carry out and that is to gather and sow some seed.

The only difference between these two lots of seeds is those on the right came from a more advanced capsule that had started opening to shed the seeds. The capsule withdraws support to the seed as it opens exposing the seed to the atmosphere causing the outer skin to harden and turn dark in colour.

Both lots of seed are viable and as you see here I have sown some direct from the plant and will place this seed pot in one of the bulb houses where I will keep it moist, not letting it dry out.

I showed the fruits of **Fuschia procumbens** a few weeks back growing on the raised wall when I stated that they are often eaten by birds and slugs. As I want some seed to sow I decided not to leave them at risk any longer so I have collected a few capsules that has provided me with plenty seed which has also been sown

Crocus ochroleucus albus, C. longiflorus, C. goulimyii ‘Sofia Agia’ MJ9562 and C. laevigatus

Crocus flowers continue rising up in the sand beds, opening when the sun warms the air enough to encourage them to display their wonderful colour.

Crocus longiflorus

Crocus goulimyii

Crocus ochroleucus albus

Having lifted a lot of leaves last week the ground is again covered with another fall this cycle will continue well into December and beyond as some of the Cotoneaster while hang on to their leaves until the spring, only shedding them if the temperature drops severely.

A number of our rhododendrons are around 5 metres in height so when I am underneath clearing leaves I take a minute to look up and enjoy the wonderful indumentum that some species have on the back of their leaves.

Rhododendron rex subsp. fictolacteum

Rhododendron bureavii

As I walk between the bulb houses my eye is always drawn down attracted by the foliage of the various Cyclamen growing in this outside sand bed which I have to pass. I constructed it using cast concrete paving edging which I filled to a depth of around 30cms with sharp sand so it is a bit like a trough without a base.

Moving round I come to one of the many groupings of troughs we have almost all of which I have made, many based around a cement mixture.

Some times through a year the troughs get left to fend for themselves however I do like to get down to check how the plants are doing especially after what has been a challenging year with a very cold winter followed by an unusually hot dry summer.

The saxifrages more or less shut down in the summer but since it cooled down in August they have put on a good period of growth however so have the mosses and liverworts. I have found that while the liverworts are not such good growing companions some moss can on occasions prove beneficial in creating a substrate that the saxifrages can root into. Over the winter I will work to remove the troublesome liverwort and find a balance with the moss.

Like all plants the liverworts require the correct environment to grow in and it is very noticeable to me how it can run rampant in some troughs yet be completely absent in others. Constant surface moisture is beneficial to the growth of liverwort, however there must be other critical factors that prevent it growing is some troughs and I will strive to understand exactly why that is.

In 2008 I created a high crevice landscape in this granite trough, carved out of a recycled paving slab, using recycled roofing slates. As is my preference I planted it up with small cuttings from a selection of plants. Compare this with the same trough (below) ten years on to see which plants survive –note especially the small grey Raoulia towards the front right corner.

The Raoulia australis has spread out climbing up the landscape – note that liverworts never grow in this trough.

There are three saxifrages growing in this trough, on the left is a late spring flowering form there is an early spring flowering from just visible on the top right of the mound and the paler green rosettes of Saxifraga brunonis, that spread by long thin stolons, are running all over.

Once more it is interesting to compare this with the same trough from 2008 when it was newly landscaped with limestone marl and planted up with a range of small saxifrage cuttings.
I always have a dilemma deciding what to do when the plants grow so well that they completely cover the rock work like this. My ideal stage is when there is a balance between exposed rock and plant.

This trough with limestone marl contains a self-seeding colony of Erinus alpinus that always seems to retain the perfect balance between exposed rock and plant.

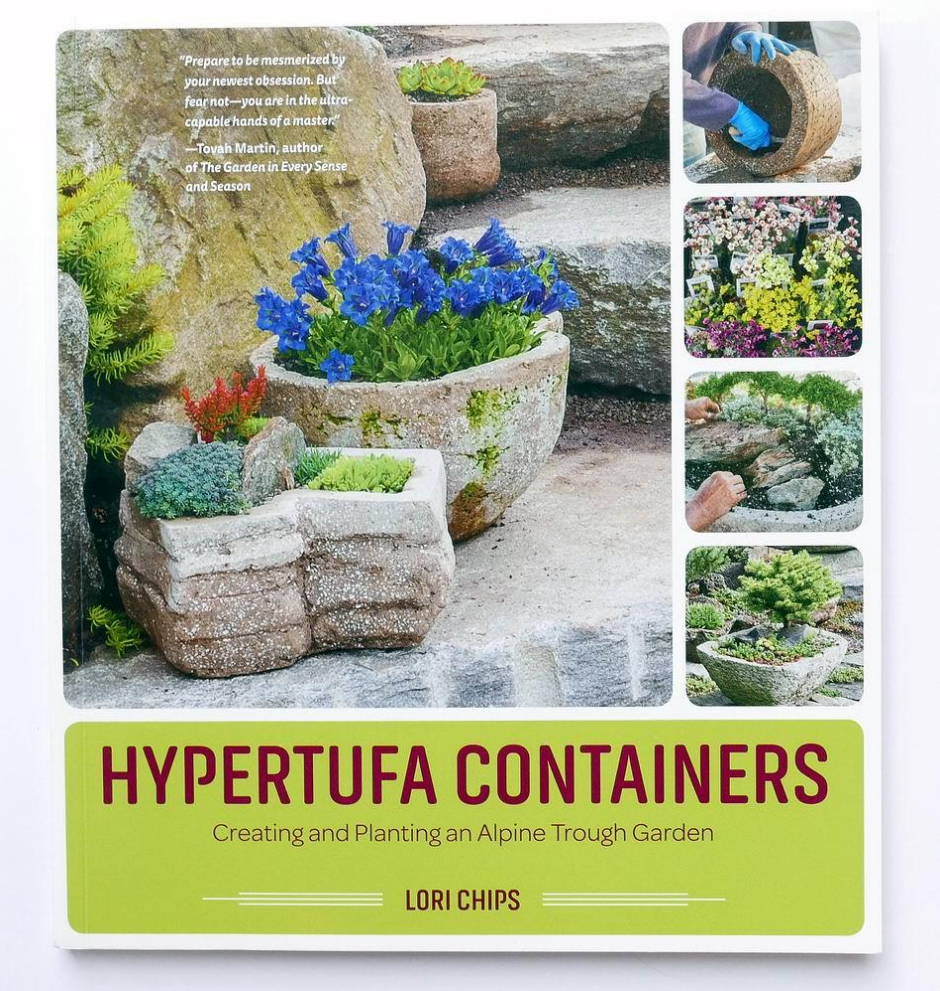
There comes a stage in the life of every trough when it has to be re-worked.

After around ten years the rock work on this trough apart from the large upright rock had been completely over grown by plants so a few months ago I stripped off the growth and replanted it with a new range of cuttings.

After six years, a cement landscaped trough – note the moss growing on the broken cement rock.

A small trough, landscaped with broken concrete and planted with sempervivum.

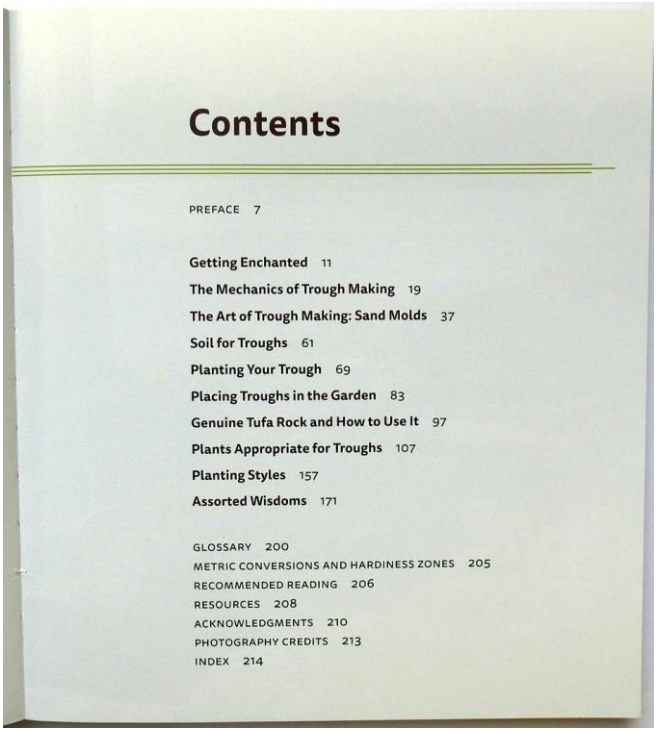
Book Review



I recently received a copy of a new book on making hypertufa containers to review.
The book starts with a brief history of growing plants in troughs followed by the obvious advantages and attractions there are of growing, especially alpines, in such containers.

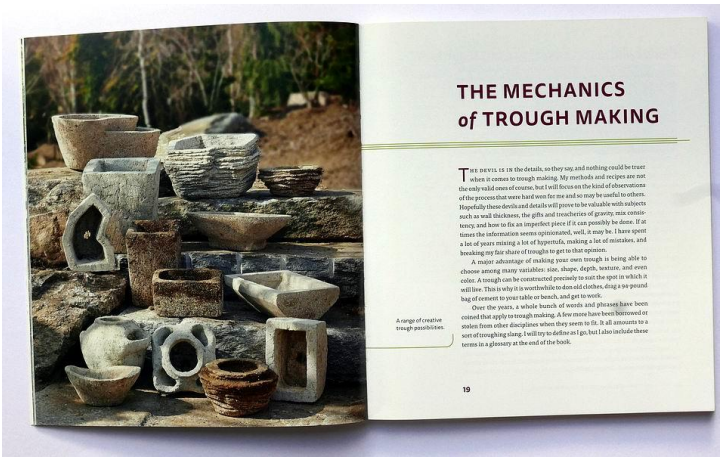
The core of the book takes you through the very easy to follow method of making a hypertufa trough starting from the basic raw materials and ending with a completed and planted container.
The author explains her hypertufa recipe giving detailed descriptions of the various stages you need to create your own container.
The main method involves building up the container around a shaped sand mould and shows a number of forms tried and tested by the author over many years.
I find this sand mould an interesting method of forming a container and once you have some experience you will be able to use your imagination and create your own unique shapes of whatever size you wish.

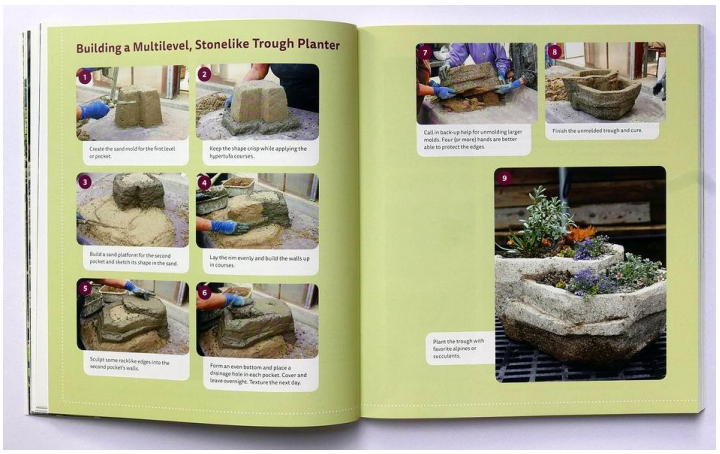
Having completed your container the book leads you through the all the stages of filling, landscaping, planting and placing the completed containers in the garden.
The importance of drainage is well explained in the soil recipe and I am delighted to see the Author's explanation of why you should not use a layer crocks in the bottom. Too many writers and broadcasters still repeat the outdated method of adding a layer of crocks that science tells us does not improve the drainage at all, indeed it has the very opposite effect of trapping water in the upper layers of the mix.
Next to be covered is the landscaping and planting and there are a range of ideas illustrated to start you off especially if you are new to this kind of gardening and need some guidance. There is sensible advice that with larger troughs it is best to place them in situ before you add to the weight by filling and planting it up plus there is a chapter on where it is best to place your trough.

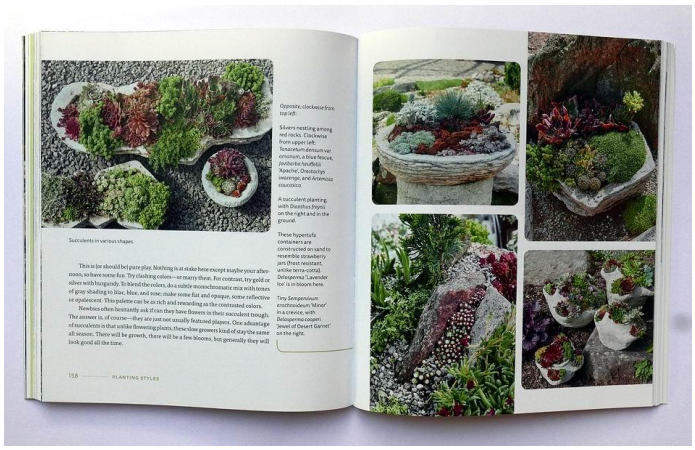

Contents

A good part of the book describes and illustrates various planting styles with many suggestions of suitable plants. Obviously the choice of the plants will depend on your local climate and conditions, as explained by the author and most of the plants suggested are suitable for beginners.
I was surprised to see the inclusion of some beautiful pictures of rosulate violas growing in their native high elevation south Andean home however the reason for their inclusion is explained in the text.

The book is intensively illustrated with step by step pictures that even without the text outline the author's methods however the engaging easy to read text will draw you in.







While the book may be aimed at beginners even people like myself who have been making and planting troughs for tens of years can pick up some ideas and inspiration from this method and some of the planting styles. I find some of the troughs planted with succulents, such as the sedum and sempervivum, especially successful and I have been inspired to try my hand at planting up a trough with Cactus- if I can find some that may be hardy in our garden. As many of the troughs shown in the book are relatively small they could be moved under glass for the winter.

HYPRTUFA CONTAINERS, by Lori Chips - ISBN: 9781604697063 is published by Timber Press and available at books stores or online – a Kindle edition is also available.
Lori Chips is a professional horticulturist, trained at New York Botanical Garden, who for twenty years has been the alpine manager at Oliver Nurseries in Connecticut, USA. It is obvious from the book that Lori has deep knowledge, experience and enthusiasm of her subject which she shares freely.

I am always delighted to see my enthusiasm for troughs being shared and this book would be a great gift to provide method, ideas and inspiration.

If you are buying it through Amazon be sure to use the link at the bottom of the SRGC web pages; that way the SRGC get a small donation at no extra cost to you.

I will round off this week with an atmospheric picture of the low sun illuminating some Acer leaves to stand out against a dark background like a stained glass widow……..