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Bulb Log Diary

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What is a garden?

That is a question I continually ponder as I walk around viewing gardens in the area.

Admittedly it is mostly front gardens that I see and obviously there is a wide range of styles from the extreme where the entire front has been lock-blocked or tarmacked to look like a carpark or garage forecourt, to some very colourful well-planted combinations that are a delight to the eye as well as providing valuable habitat for the wild life.

Gardens are obviously important for many reasons and have been mentioned throughout written history from the Garden of Eden, Gethsemane, the



Hanging Gardens of Babylon, Claude Monet's Giverny, up to the many gardens of modern times. Some people just seem to want something that is easily kept, requiring little work- others don't mind the work and have a well-tended square of grass surrounded by neat narrow borders showing little imagination - however my favourites are more creative in both layout and planting. To some of these people our front garden must look like a chaotic wilderness which is exactly what I want it to be. Most weeks in the Bulb Log I will feature individual or groups of plants often looking at the detail but this week I am looking at the bigger picture; the plants that form the structure of the garden.

I took most of the pictures in this Bulb Log early on Sunday morning in light drizzle as I walked around in contemplation. The first picture is the view as I step out of the back door and is typical of many gardens with pots of plants, cuttings and seedlings, watering cans and the other signs that reminds me this is a working garden not a show garden.

For much of the growing season our attention is attracted towards the flowering of the ground level plantings but, now the long season of flowers provided by our dense planting is slowing down, our eyes are drawn upwards through the colourful textured layers of shrubs and trees.





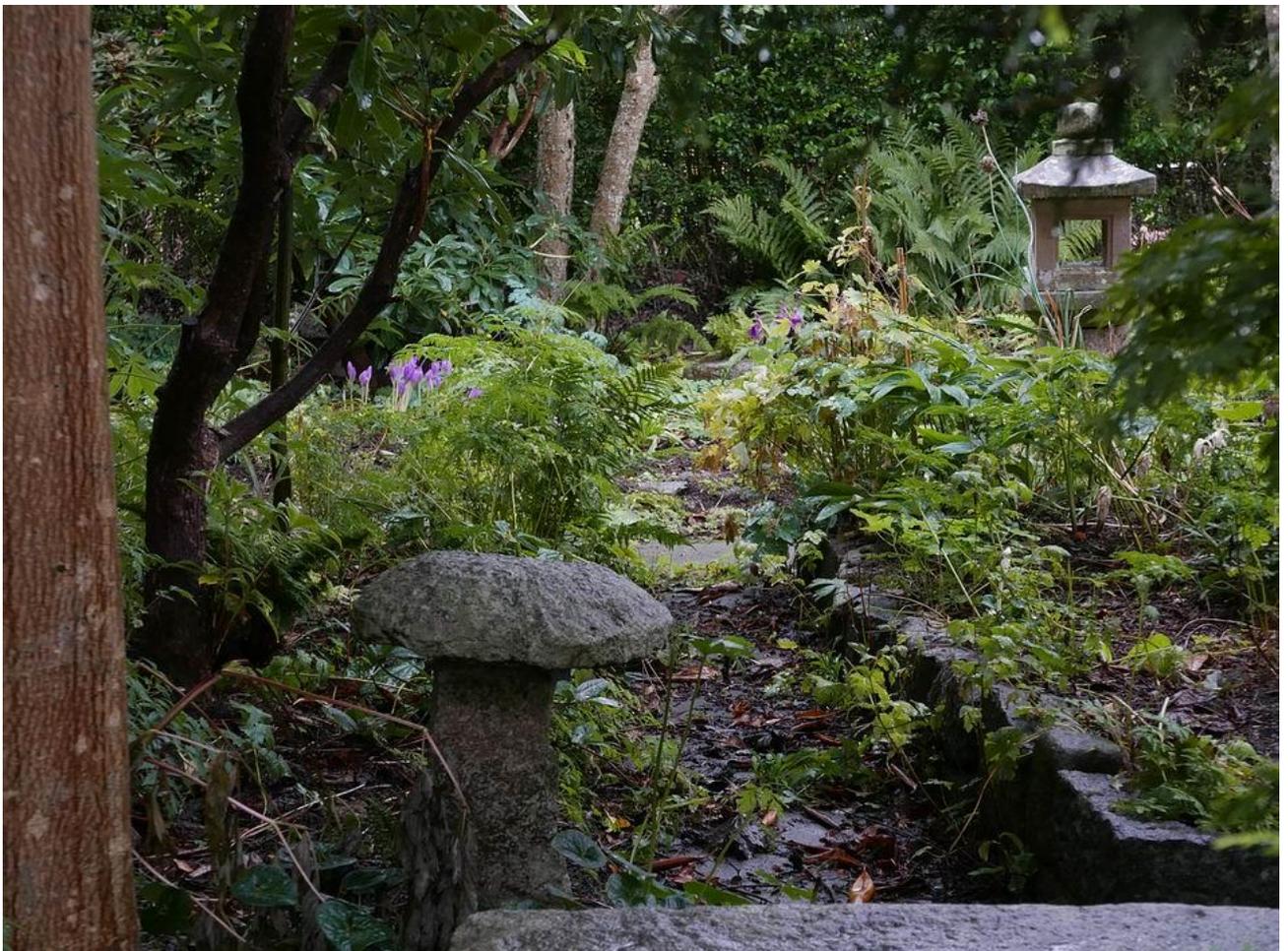
When I am in the garden I want to feel as if I could be in a landscape - an open woodland habitat which in itself contains multiple habitats.



There is no point from where you can see the whole garden - pathways invite you to walk and explore and as I walk more habitats are revealed.



At the right of the path is one of the areas where I have been recently re-working by removing some plants to create space for others. Our garden is so densely planted that in most instances if we want to plant something then something has to come out to make the space.



A few steps further on and I get a glimpse through to another path which I can only reach by walking round the garden. Spot the lantern which you will see again further down if you continue to walk with me.



Further down the path the view suddenly opens up to reveal I am approaching a more open space with a choice of directions.



One of those options leads towards the path which goes around the raised central bed which, as well as being a feature and habitat in itself, contains several more habitats such as the planting spaces between the vertical rocks of the wall.



Being so familiar with the garden and knowing how the waves of colour, provided by the bulbs and other plants, carpet the ground for so many months, the garden seems bare just now but standing back and looking at what is visible now, I realise this is the garden.

Various forms of raised beds are to be found in several places around the garden. To the right of the central raised bed is the raised wall and walking path between them leads me to an area currently going through some major changes.





For interest and comparison I have included two historical shots of the same area - above when we still had some grass and below after we lifted the grass with the newly laid gravel.





When you first start creating a garden the aim is to get it planted up and encourage growth however this growth does not stop and there comes a point where your main task switches to cutting back and taking out - which I am doing at the far end of the raised wall.

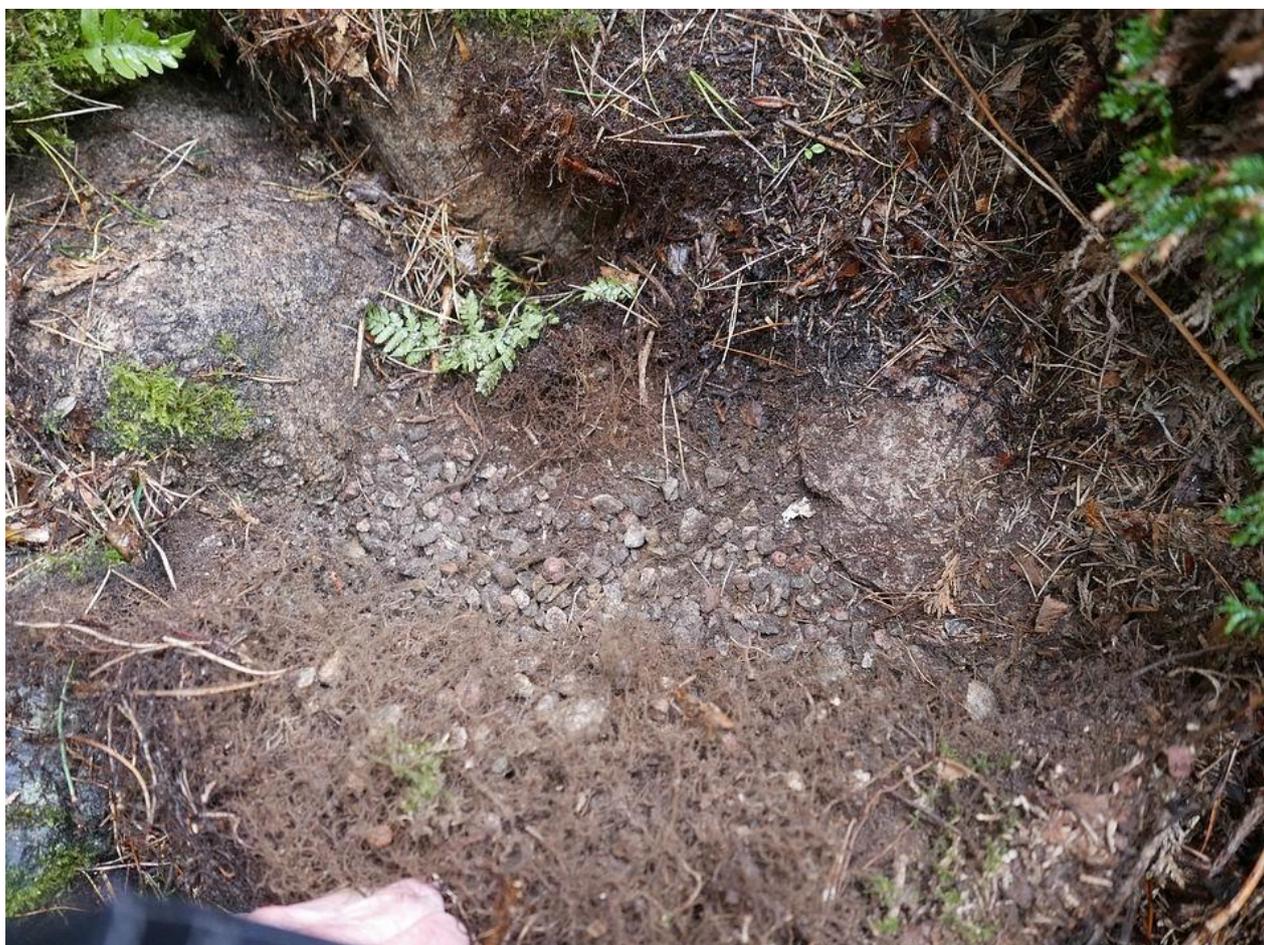


The shrubs were dominating the ground space inhibiting growth and hiding the far end of the wall and after careful consideration we decided to cut back or remove a number of Rhododendrons. While you can change your mind when making the original plantings, when it is easy to move the small plants around, you cannot reverse the cutting back or removing of thirty plus year old subjects.



This end of the wall had disappeared from view under the Rhododendron growth which was in turn under the branches of a number of trees - I also removed a number of common volunteer ferns which had colonised the wall.

While I was removing one of the ferns I lifted the root mat that came up like a rug to reveal the original gravel area – garden archaeology. Leaves and debris had gathered on this corner of the gravel forming the perfect habitat to allow the fern to spore grow outside of the original bed - the rocks just disappearing out of view at the left of the picture formed the edge.





My wee helper Molly peaks through the overgrowth of trees and shrubs on the top of the wall which are also being assessed to see what we will leave and what we will cut back.



The reverse view looking from the high side of the wall towards the bed I am opening up.



To give you an idea of height the long loppers are nearly 3m in length and very useful for trimming back the overhanging branches to allow more light through to the ground below.



After an initial cutting back and the removal of some shrubs the top of the wall is opening up with new planting opportunities for the next phase of the gardening journey.



Stepping back to assess - this is less than a third of the area I am re-opening to allow ground level planting the rest, which I started to work on last year, is behind me.



Primula waltonii

A month or so ago I split and planted out some pot bound *Primula waltonii* in this space - encouraged by their new found freedom they have produced some out of season flowers. It is an interesting 'historical fact' that the first incarnation of this area was predominately as a primula bed.

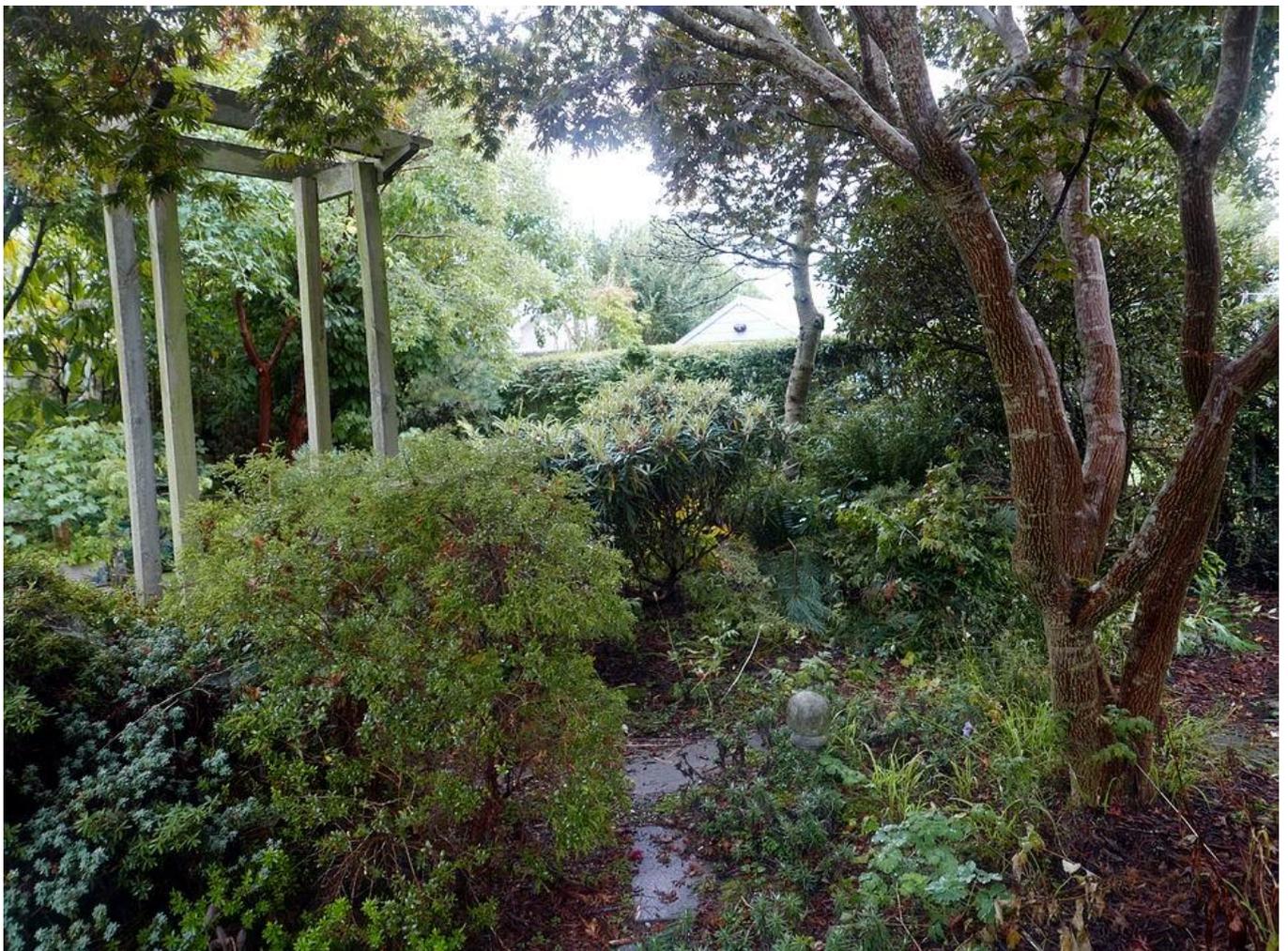


After showing you the area I am working on I will now continue on my walk around the garden.





From a single standing point there are multiple views.



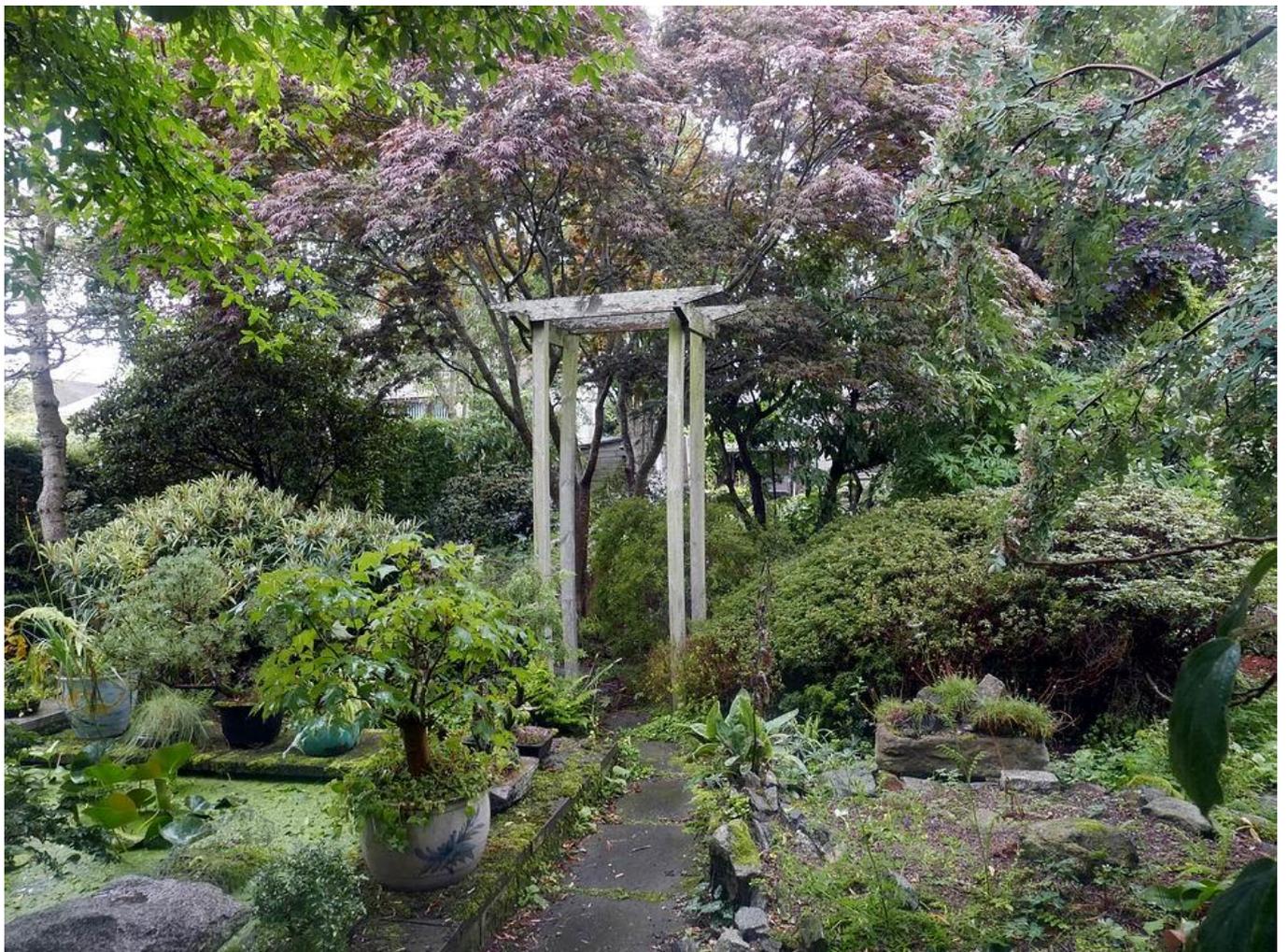


Stepping through the gate way you reach the pond and surroundings which provides another range of habitats - I will return and explore these in a future Bulb Log.



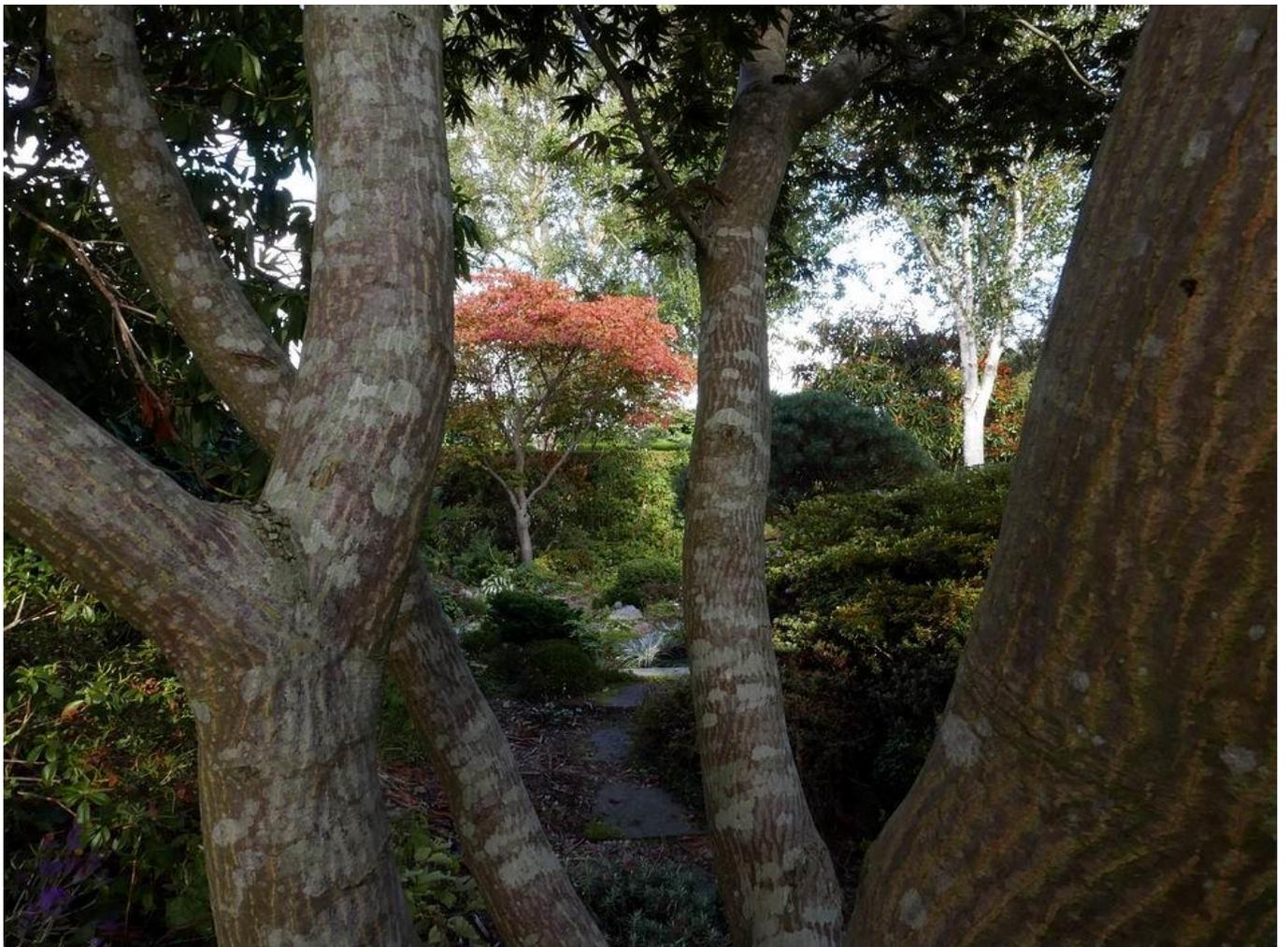


I have been enjoying watching the growth of bulbs plants and seed in this new bed, built last year using some troughs as edging – I allowed most of the flowers to self-seed.



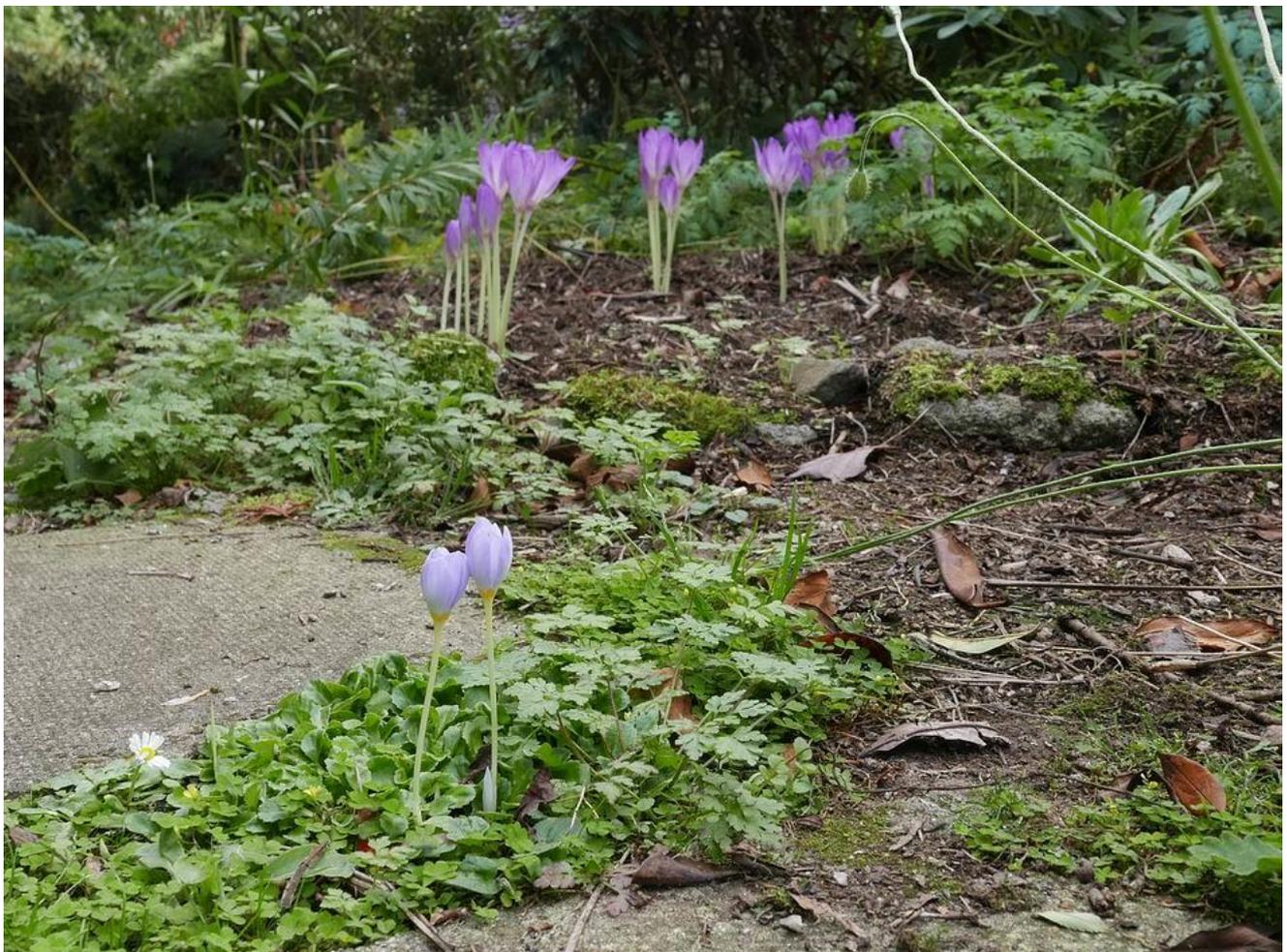


Going back through the gate I am now heading back towards the house down the path littered with the debris of autumn. Below trees provide both the frame and the focus of attention in this picture.





Molly views some of the late summer flowering *Veratrum* and *Roscoea* which bridge the change of season as autumn *Colchicum* flowers start to emerge.

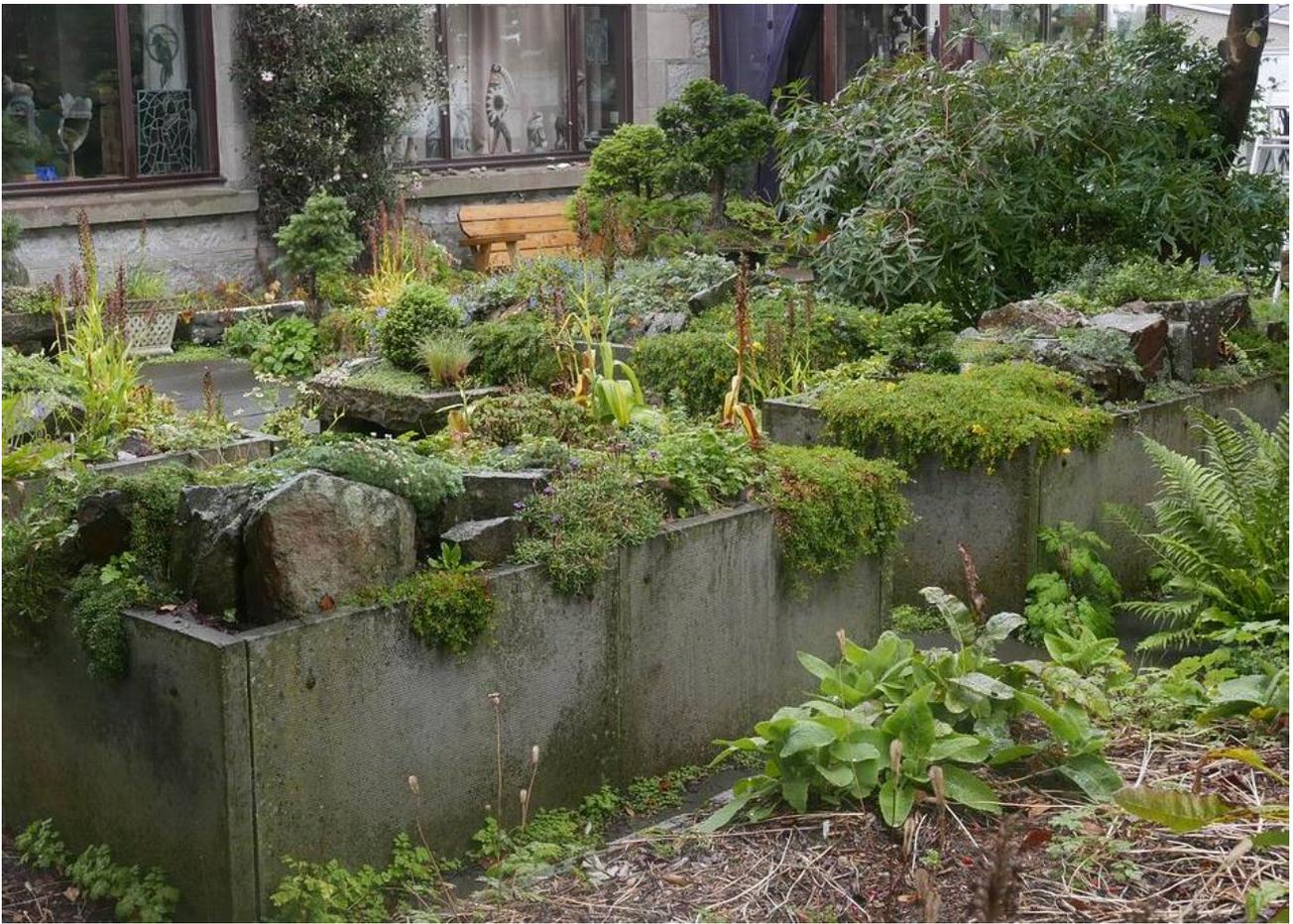


Autumn flowering *Crocus* and *Colchicum*.



Getting nearer to the house the habitat changes from a woodland feel to a more open rock garden area with raised beds and troughs.





Here we mimic the type of habitat found in the rocky exposed mountains.



Now the sun is breaking through you will see the trees still have an influence as they cast a shadow. So what is a garden? My answer is your garden can be whatever you want it to be - our garden is a journey through time where we laid out the hard landscape, introduce plants then allow nature to play a part in the future plantings by way of self-seeding - it is my workshop, studio, library, museum and playground a place where we can experiment, learn, create, relax and enjoy. A year ago I looked at the design and layout of the garden in a [Bulb Log Video Diary Supplement](#) click the link if you wish to view.....