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Bulb Log Diary

ISSN 2514-6111

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BULB LOG 34..... 9th August 2020





The tree trimmed and back on stand.

This week for the first time ever I decided to put myself on the cover to show the size of some of our bonsai – it is really quite a job to pick them up and move them on my own.

Normally I trim them at least twice a year but the last time I gave this tree a good trim was in April 2018 when I also pruned the roots, [Bulb Log 1518](#). Roots mostly feed at their tips so pruning has the effect of reducing growth until the roots regrow new feeding tips. There was little growth through the rest of 2018 and limited growth through 2019 but this year's good growth indicates that the roots are also growing again and the tree will need regular trimming once more.



This is like a change-over time in our garden – a period when we have fewer plants flowering. Many of them have been in growth for months and looking towards autumn/winter are starting to retreat so I have a brief window to get on with some trimming, clipping and pruning before the autumn flowering plants get going. The hedges are all cut and now I am catching up with shredding all the clippings, using my trusty shredder, which quickly reduces a great heap into a more compact volume of nicely chopped up material that will be composted before being spread as mulch - if you want to see it in action click this [Shredder video](#) link to go to my YouTube channel.



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The shredder goes through the material as quickly as I can feed it in the hopper the only thing that slows the job down is I have to keep removing and emptying the bag that collects the newly shredded material.



This is the pile of shreadings that I started a few days ago –it has already started to change colour.



Even after a few days the composting process has started indicated by the change of colour and the steam rising up when I probe in a bit where the temperature has already reached 27C. I know that many of you are currently experiencing temperatures higher than that in a heat wave but here the ambient temperature is just 15C so this is some 10 -12 degrees higher.



The bigger the heap gets the hotter the temperatures it can reach – I have previously recorded temperatures of above 50C in a large covered heap. As I add to this heap I will square it off and cover it up to hold in the heat.



Now a picture essay of a trough starting mid-august some ten years ago when I filled this trough with sand, landscaped it with slate then planted it with unrooted saxifrage cuttings – to prevent the birds pulling the cuttings out I covered it in a fleece.



The same trough the following spring and then one year on shows the cuttings have rooted and made good growth.



This is the same trough ten years on with **Saxifraga studiosorum** spreading out by runners taking over the front and sending runners down the sides hoping that the plantlets will find somewhere to lay down roots.



Because of the position the back of the trough which was also the highest point got overgrown a bit by a rhododendron shading out some of the plants. Their place was taken by inappropriate volunteer plants while *Saxifraga studiosorum* continued to grow towards the front. This is the nature of troughs; you will need to work on them on a regular basis to keep the plants growing well and in balance with the scale of the landscape. My favoured tool in the

garden is a builder's trowel and its flat blade is ideal for working in the narrow crevices formed between the slates.



I cut off all the *Saxifraga studiosorum* plantlets that were hanging down the sides and will place them on the high section but not before I have added around 1cm of compost to bring the level up and watered it in see below.





With the cuttings now in place I have watered once more and will continue to make sure they stay moist until they make root, turning this into a *Saxifraga studiosorum* trough.



There were more cuttings than I needed so I have potted some up, above right, just as I did with the *Saxifraga brunonis* ones, left, a few weeks ago where they have already grown significantly from the tiny specs that I planted.



I did mention previously that we mostly grow **Saxifraga brunonis** for the decorative foliage, now it is in peak flower you can see why.



The flowers are produced sporadically through late august and September: the yellow highlights dance above the foliage in the hope of attracting a pollinator.



I have started to lift some of the mesh baskets in the Erythronium plunge bed. Many of them have not been replanted for around four years as the growth of self-sown *Meconopsis* indicates – ideally I would like to do this every second year.



I slipped the first basket out from between the *Meconopsis* this one is full of *Erythronium dens-canis*.

The most interesting part of bulbous plants is the bit that hides underground. It is the variation of these structures that have evolved to protect the plant through dry periods that has fascinated me for years. I never tire of studying their form, growth cycle and the way that they increase.

This cluster of **Erythronium dens-canis** bulbs illustrates the increase from a single bulb over the four plus years since it was last lifted.



Sorting through the basket I placed the bulbs in clonal clusters some obviously had increased more than others.



Erythronium dens-canis bulbs

Erythronium dens-canis produces a more extensive root system than the Western North American species do. These are last year's roots; the new ones will emerge soon and support next season's growth and flowering



Cleaning some of the bulbs shows they are shaped like a dog's canine tooth hence the specific name *dens-canis* it is also why they are often called 'Dogs Tooth Violets'. These bulbs stay at more or less the same depth where I planted them unlike their North American cousins whose bulbs always burrow down to the bottom of the baskets.



The chain of structures at the base where the roots attach are the remains of previous years bulbs; these will remain for several years and if anything happens to the dominant bulb then they can form secondary bulbs. Shortly the new roots will emerge from the base of the main bulb.

The secondary buds on the chains can be stimulated to grow by removing them from the main bulb and breaking them into individual links. Sometimes secondary buds can form while the dominant bulb is still attached and these are the forms that will increase as illustrated in the clusters of bulbs shown in the previous images.



Re-potting

In an ideal world you could use completely fresh compost but in our case that is a lot of material to find every year.

I have found that they grow perfectly well if I refresh the old compost which is a mix of loam, sand/grit and leaf mould.



The sand/grit and loam elements are fairly stable so do not break down so I just replace the leaf mould, as seen above.

Leaf mould spread out on the old compost.



Next I scatter some bone meal across the top - this will slowly break down releasing nitrogen and phosphorous to feed the bulbs through the growing season, I will add a potassium supplement when they are in flower next spring which is when the plants need it to build another new bulb.

The task now is to thoroughly mix the refreshed compost evenly before replanting the basket.



I am not interested in cloning out these **Erythronium dens-canis** bulbs: I want this to be a mixed basket to encourage cross pollination increasing the chance of a good seed production so I mix them up before replanting.



Erythronium dens-canis bulbs

The old roots did not look completely dried out so I have not removed them.

The next basket had a large **Meconopsis** plant growing in it which will have to be dealt with.

This one contains **Erythronium 'Craigton Cover Girl'** which is an **Erythronium revolutum** hybrid.



Erythronium 'Craigton Cover Girl' bulbs

I always tip the basket upside down because I expect the bulbs to have made their way to the very bottom – a number were trying to squeeze through the tiny mesh of the base.



Erythronium 'Craigton Cover Girl' bulbs



These bulbs have evolved a similar structure to those of dens-canis with the exception that they tend to grow downwards – note how the base of the new bulb is lower than the remains of the old ones, this is often very pronounced.



I fill the basket one third with compost then place the bulbs and I know that they will have made their way down by the time I get round to lifting them again.

You can read more about how to grow Erythroniums in my E-book [Erythroniums in Cultivation](#) which is free to download.



As well as another Meconopsis I also found some Crocus corms in this basket of Erythronium revolutum.



I know there are a number of autumn flowering *Crocus* species, such as *banaticus*, *nudiflorus* and *vallicola* seeding around the erythronium baskets. After planting the *Erythronium* in the bottom third of the basket I re-planted the crocus in the top third again.



An important task as I work my way through repotting the baskets is to ensure the sand is well packed around them so there is good contact and no air spaces between the plunge and the basket.



I was interested to note how these *Meconopsis* roots were going straight down through the sand rather than trying to go through the mesh into the basket of compost.

My task now is to find somewhere in the garden to plant these displaced *Meconopsis*.....