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# Bulb Log Diary

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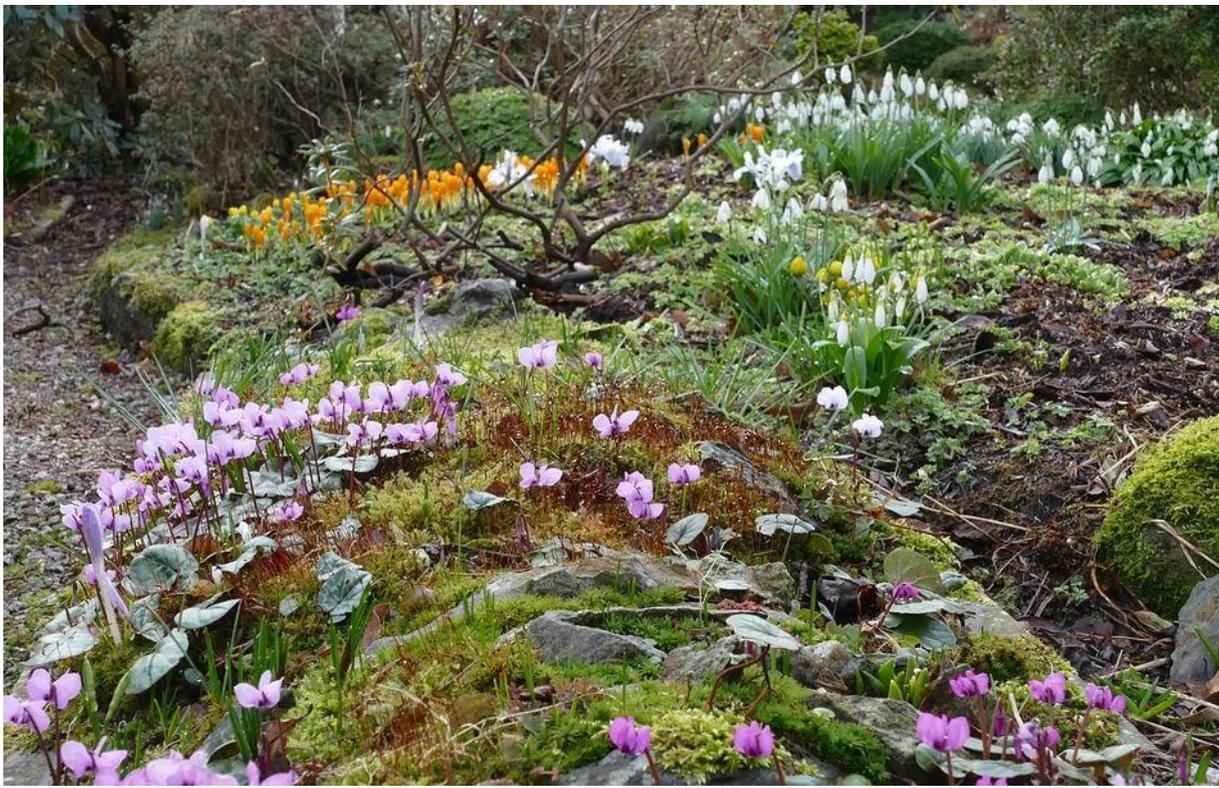
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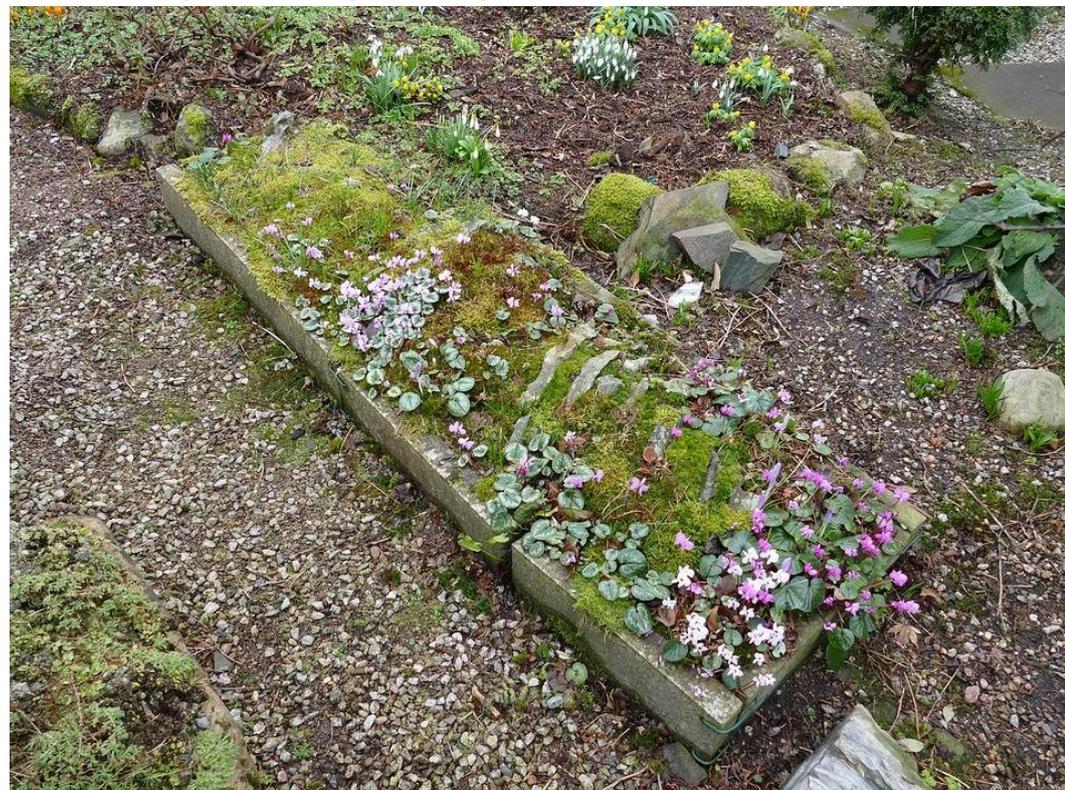
Cyclamen coum



It is often written that a garden is a habitat however my years have taught me that a garden is made of many micro habitats - some of these can be very small to the extent that when a plant fails to grow in one spot it may be that replanting it as little as 30cms away could make a difference.

One of the simplest changes gardeners can make to the habitat involves making adjustments to the natural soil. This is usually done by adding more gravel or sand to open up heavy soils to improve the porosity and drainage or by adding humus to light sandy soils to help retain moisture. 'Rock Gardening' is a general term applied to the type of gardening that many of us do but it is more of a philosophy than a description of one specific type of garden. One thing that most 'Rock Gardeners' will have in common is that we tend to grow hardy plants, many of them are wild species, whose hardiness comes from them having evolved to grow at higher altitudes on mountains. Mountains are rocky environments so rock gardens will imitate this habitat by using rocks in some way; from the extreme crevice style where the garden is almost entirely rocks, to making raised beds with rocks, all the way to just using the occasional rock for decorative values. The one thing all these styles have in common is that every rock manipulates in some way its immediate surroundings. We have used rocks in most of these ways in our garden, often using them to create a raised edge so we can increase the depth of the soil to accommodate the annual mulch of humus that we add.

A garden design evolves through time so the foot print of previous structures can often dictate the layout of later projects. In the original garden layout I built a tiered wooden bench on this spot to display some of the smaller bonsai trees however many of the bonsai out grew the bench which eventually rotted and was in danger of falling apart. In 2007, [Bulb Log 1907](#), I decided to remove the old wooden bench and build a low raised bed in its place, hence the odd shape which can give the impression of being a long low trough - however it has no base. At first I thought this would be used to plunge mesh baskets of bulbs but I quickly changed my mind and created a sand bed by adding around 30 cms of sharp sand decorating the surface with a few rocks placed in the crevice style; see [Bulb Log 2607](#).



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The evolution of this habitat continues because initially I kept the surface of the sand clear removing any moss that grew, however after a number of years I decided, through laziness or wisdom, to allow the moss to grow. How such a small habitat manipulation like this can be one of the factors that allow you to grow a plant is illustrated by *Cyclamen coum* which despite many attempts we had failed to establish in our garden until in 2006 when I was adding the sand to this small bed I also sowed some seed and now we have this delightful self-seeding colony. The bulbs do not mind the moss in fact they seem to germinate better in this mossy habitat, I have saved myself a lot of work keeping the sand clear and visually I prefer this more natural look much better than bare sand.



***Cyclamen coum***



**Cyclamen coum**



The other factor in this self-seeding colony of *Cyclamen coum* is that every subsequent generation of seedlings evolve naturally to be more tolerant of these growing conditions – some are also seeding down into the gravel path.



It is interesting the way that gardens are not so much 'designed' as instead they evolve as the gardener responds to circumstances. Originally there was a bird feeder on a pole in the centre of this rectangle near the back door with nothing but the occasional bit of the mixed bird seeds germinating. As the wider garden matured it became a diverse habitat providing the birds with a natural supply of food so except in the worst of the winters there was less of a need for us to feed the birds so I converted this area to a low raised sand bed. I planted a wide range of bulbs in the sand many of which were crocus and mice love to eat

crocus corms and they found it all too easy to dig down through the soft sand gorging themselves on my precious crocus corms. The cobble crevice style surface was my reaction in an attempt to deter the mice from being able to dig the corms so easily and so far it has worked and once more I prefer this incarnation much better than the original surface of bare sand. The rocks also modify the habitat in a number of ways such as by shading the ground in hot sunshine, storing and releasing that heat in the hours of darkness as well as helping retain moisture.



**Eranthis and Galanthus** growing in the cobble bed.



### **Leucojum and Eranthis**

One of the key aspects of our garden philosophy is to allow the plants to self-seed and in the foreground you can see a whole cluster of Eranthis seeds germinating where they fell last spring – the Leucojum are also seeding.



Part of my yellow river of **Eranthis hyemalis** flowing out across the garden.



When the temperatures gets to 6C and above the Crocus, Eranthis and Galanthus flowers all expand fully giving the colourful display much more volume and impact than it has when the flowers are closed.





Formerly known to us as *Crocus gargaricus herberti*, **Crocus thirkianus** likes our cool moist humus-rich habitat where it spreads by sending out short solons forming attractive spreading groups rather than congested clumps as many other bulbs do. Below you can see that as the temperature rises to 6C the flowers start to open.





In an attempt to mimic a woodland environment we top dress some of the beds annually with an organic mulch using only material from the garden, mostly leaves or shredded and composted prunings.



***Crocus tommasianus***

The gravel covered areas surrounding the paths have become a wonderful seed bed for many bulbs such as these Crocus.



**Crocus tommasinianus**

Allowing a garden to grow naturally by letting the plants seed around brings such rewards as this cluster of Crocus flowering in the gravel area along with some Cyclamen many other plants including a bit of moss.





***Crocus tommasinianus***



***Crocus tommasinianus* and *Corydalis malkensis***

Looking from the lower level of the garden towards the New Bed beside the pond which is another habitat I recently created, or to be more correct a group of micro-habitats, built on the foot print of previous incarnations. I described the history and construction in [Bulb Log 4119](#) . Raised up and landscaped with some carefully placed rocks this bed offered me a planting opportunity for many of my favourite smaller plants.



For the last few years I have been giving this bed a natural look by mulching it with pine needles.



**Eranthis 'Guinea Gold'**



**Erythronium dens-canis** from the most easterly known distribution of the species in Zhytomyr in the Ukraine.



One of a number of **Erythronium caucasicum** seedlings I planted out are flowering for the first time this year others have just a single leaf so will need to grow a bit more; hopefully they will flower next year.



**Narcissus  
cyclamineus**

Moving on a group of *Narcissus cyclamineus* is flowering under a dwarf pine tree on the raised wall.



Habitats come in all shapes and sizes and these ***Corydalis malkensis*** choose to grow in this pot with the dwarf elm, *Ulmus 'Jacqueline Hillier'*. It started out with a single plant probably arriving when I top dressed the pot with some old potting compost recycled from the seed frames and now the colony is spreading out around the pot – interestingly these are always the first of this species to come into flower.



Looking towards the bulb houses I would once have seen just some beds and the path however now I see masses of habitats the majority of which are already populated by plants right down to the carpet of moss on top of the stone mushroom.





The extreme light and shade illustrated in this picture is one of the many variables in the garden which can have an effect how the plants might grow.





The ground is slowly disappearing by the new growth in the bulb bed.





**Eranthis hyemalis**



While you can plan the layout, real gardens cannot be designed, they are dynamic entities evolving and maturing along with the gardener who should be proactive responding to the ever changing growth and circumstances.

Molly says you can see her in the latest [Bulb Log Video Diary Supplement](#).....