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Bulb Log Diary

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BULB LOG 46...11th November 2020



Eucomis bicolor



The flowering stems of **Eucomis bicolor** are at their most colourful when the above ground parts of the plants are approaching the end of their season. The bright green seed pods bring a third colour to the bicolored flowers which also intensify in hue as they fade. Soon the frosts will cause it to collapse and the plant will retreat to be stored and protected in the underground tuber where it will be preserved until it reappears next summer for another cycle.



Walking around the garden I find other plants ready to shed their seed: here the pods on a stem of **Lilium mackliniae** are opening and ready to shed their seed. I always leave some of this species to shed naturally into the garden but will delay sowing any I save to sow in pots until late January to prevent them from germinating before the winter bites.



A group of bright red Arisaema seeds some of which will be scattered around other areas of the garden where I think their growth will blend with and add to the sequential nature of our plantings.



These bright red Arisaema fruits drew my eye to this autumnal scene also featuring a cluster of fungi.



Acer platanoides 'Crimson King' is the tree with the largest leaves in the garden and when they drop it is easiest if I get them lifted quickly before they get too wet. Some of the smaller acer, birch and sorbus leaves can be left as a natural mulch on shrub beds but larger leaves can form laminated layers, especially when they get wet, which can be slow to break down as well as preventing the spring growth, especially seedlings, from reaching the light.



The red carpet which covered this familiar scene for the last few weeks quickly turned brown and needed clearing up. The dry leaves are so easily lifted with a leaf-vac which also shreds them but it does not work so well when the leaves are saturated so I was fortunate to have fine weather for the task.



Once the leaves are lifted and shredded they are stacked in the composting area where they break down into leaf mould and eventually, if left for longer, a leaf soil, however in recent years I have made piles under trees or shrubs to be spread out as a mulch when I have cleared the bed of old growths.



I am not sure if it is a result of wisdom or laziness that, rather than carting all the shredded prunings and leaves to the composting area at the bottom of the garden only to have to bring it all back in a few months, in recent years I just make small piles in the bed where they will be spread out as a mulch in the winter months.



***Podophyllum versipelle* 'Spotty Dotty'**

I could not resist taking a picture of the low sun light shining through the leaves of 'Spotty Dotty'.



As we are head into winter I like to review the state of the troughs especially noting how the plants have grown.



From a distance it is obvious that some plants have grown better, or should I say, quicker than others. I well remember how bad many of the saxifrages looked at the beginning of the year. They looked all but dead with just a tiny speck of green at the tips but after I added a bit of fertiliser during the season they

have grown well – now they have to survive another winter.



Obviously some of the plants are more vigorous than others so I will have to intervene to prevent the plant on the right from swamping the slower growing ones towards the left. This is easily done and I will be cutting it back soon and using the material I remove as cuttings to make more plants.



Another task especially in the plants with smaller rosettes is to remove any moss and liverwort.



This is a record of a trough before I do the pre-winter tidy up.

I never rush to remove a saxifrage that appears to be dying out because I have observed how they can regenerate.

While the centre dies out small rosettes around the edge can root down as shown here where two small plants have now formed.





An update on the **Androsace studiosorum** cuttings that I took a month or so ago placing the cutting directly back into the trough. The healthy growth indicates that they have all started to root and next year they should establish like the parent plant lower down in the same trough, see below.



The broken concrete I originally used to landscape this trough was not very good and after several years it disintegrated to such an extent that it was no longer a suitable habitat. Leaving the self-seeded *Erinus* that was trailing over the sides I re-landscaped with some broken – granite, the only spare rock I could find around the garden.

This granite is a local rock that is used to build garden walls but I have never found it easy to create a satisfying landscape – the joints are never very convincing making it look too contrived. What the years of experience has taught me is that sometime you need to be patient observing builders rebuilding a local wall that had fallen down I realised that it only started to look good when they pointed it by filling the irregular joints with the final layer of cement. I need to allow the plants to act as the cement pointing and allow them to grow to fill and smooth the joints and as time passes the granite landscape starts to become more pleasing.





Sometimes we will get the planting wrong – at the time of planting the Dianthus was in scale with the landscape and other plants but since it was planted it has grown so well it is threatening to swamp the other plants.



I have a spare trough into which I will move the Dianthus allowing me to reinstate the original scale and landscape for this trough.



Every trough becomes a habitat where I can experiment on a small scale: many years ago I placed a single lump of limestone into this small trough then inspired by observing *Erinus alpinus* growing on walls I started to scatter seeds until eventually a self-seeding colony was established.



Following on from the success with the limestone I decided to try and do the same thing with a lump of broken concrete. I sculpted the concrete to give it a natural look then drilled some holes which I filled with soil mixed with some *Erinus* seeds however I choose a bad year to start this experiment because we experienced the hottest driest summer on record and nothing grew on my lump of concrete. If at first you don't succeed I am trying again I have transplanted some small *Eranthis* seedlings onto the rock and there are the first signs of moss also establishing which will create a receptive environment for more seeds to establish.



Now I will show a few more troughs to show the state of the growth as the plants are shutting down for winter.



Some of the first troughs I ever made were to showcase Scottish plants growing in different habitat: there was one for woodland, seaside as well as mountain habitats and in this trough I have planted or sown seed of wild plants some may refer to as weeds such as *Cymbalaria muralis* and *Cochlearia danica* among others to see how they will compare in growth and decoration with our other troughs.



One more with the troughs in the foreground in late autumn compared with the same scene below in early spring.





Some of the trees hold on to their leaves till later so we still have a partial canopy and some late colour.





These seed raised *Acer japonicum* are always among the last to shed their leaves only some of the *Cotoneasters* hold on till later so lifting leaves will be continuing for some more weeks yet.....