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Bulb Log Diary

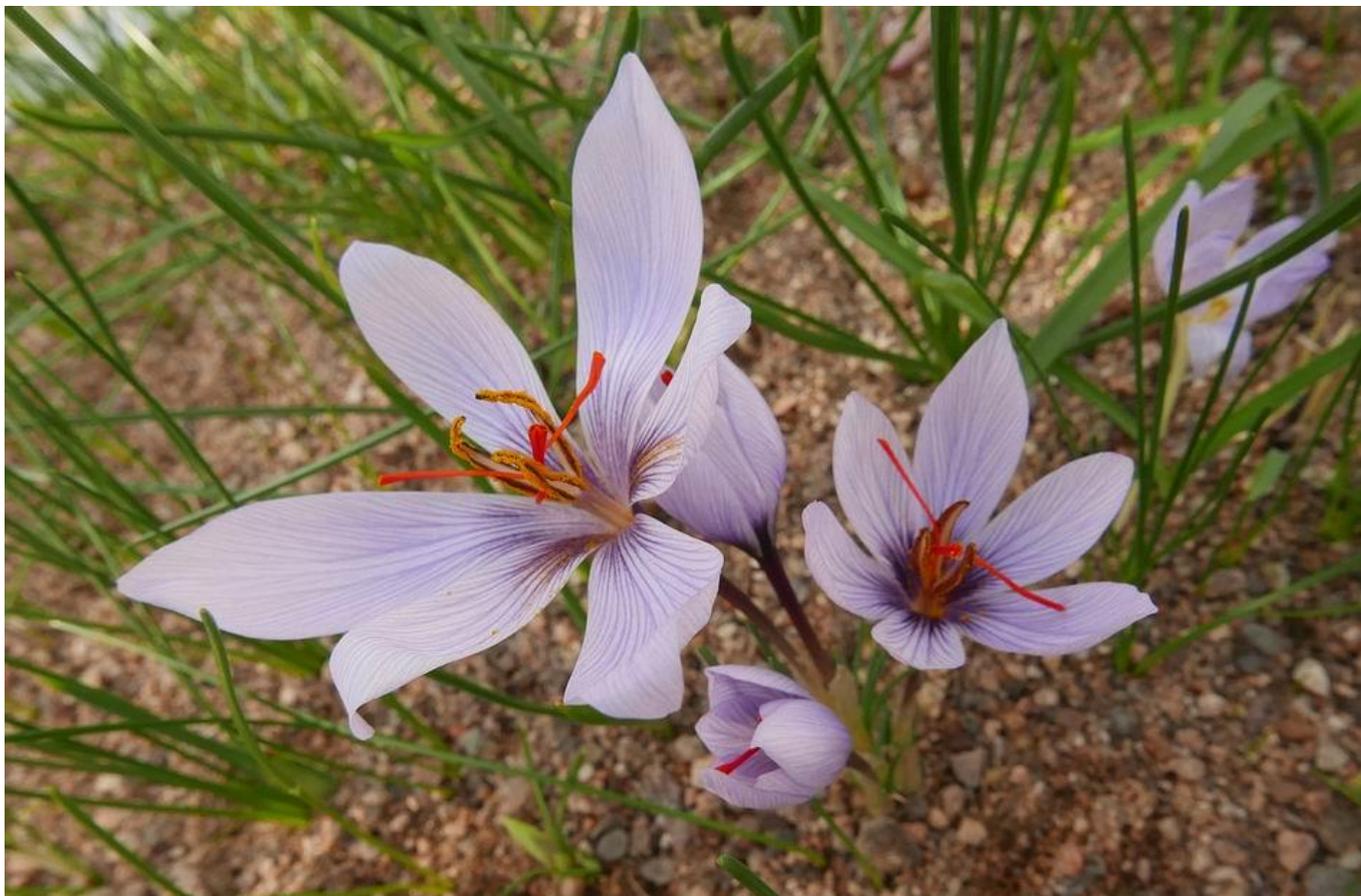
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BULB LOG 43.....21st October 2020



Crocus pallasii 'Homeri'



Crocus pallasii 'Homeri'

I think the genus *Crocus* is a top contender to be the most beautiful of all the flowers. The range of colour combinations and markings delivered by these relatively simple flowers is stunning plus we have the advantage of both spring and autumn flowering species with at least one, *Crocus laevigatus*, bridging the gap by producing occasional flowers throughout the winter. These are all growing in the semi freedom of the sand beds where I have no labels so to name them I have to rely on the powers of my observation and memory with regular references to Janis Ruksans's excellent monograph 'The World of Crocuses'.



Crocus wattiorum



Crocus wattiorum



Crocus ligusticum



Crocus hadriaticus



Crocus niveus



Some of the bulbs in the sand beds are not hardy outside for us but we also grow some that are. Those in the open garden are at the mercy of our weather which can prove too much of a challenge, especially in autumn and winter, when rain and wind can destroy the delicate flowers. Some years we have flower buds that never open because the weather is cold, dark and cloudy while the same species under the protection of the bulb houses stand a better chance of the temperature being sufficient to trigger the full display of the flowers.



The first growths of *Tropaeolum azureum* and *tricolor* are rising up from the sand so I direct them to climb up the mesh along the left hand and far away walls but this year I decided to add some sticks as an experiment to see if it improves the look of the display.



Crocus laevigatus



Crocus laevigatus

The first of the *Crocus laevigatus* of the season is flowering now - different seedlings will flower through the winter with the last often appearing in February or March.



In the glass houses whether they are growing in pots or the sand it is important that I remove all the flowers as they wither and collapse – failure to do this results in them becoming infected with moulds which can damage or even destroy the leaves and corms.



The crocus flowers should come away cleanly with a sharp tug leaving nothing to attract moulds.



Galanthus reginae olgae



The Galanthus reginae olgae in these pots are new to us and add to the few autumn flowering snowdrops we have.

The flowers in the pot second from the right are just breaking through the surface now and should appear above the rim in a few days.

Galanthus 'Anmarie Kee'



Chopping up Narcissus bulbs when they are dormant has long been practiced as a way to increase stock both commercially and by enthusiastic growers like myself.



The bulbs can be cut down to include just two scales, (twin scaling) but with smaller bulbs I find it best to split them into larger slices. The picture above shows the newly sliced up bulb on the left and the new buds and roots forming on some done some eight weeks earlier.

After a season's growth at least one small bulb will have formed between the scales of each section.

Having recently been shown pictures of a successful method used by a large scale commercial grower who simply chopped up snowdrop bulbs then planted them directly back into the ground I decided to experiment and try a similar procedure.



On 23rd August I chopped up some less than flowering sized Narcissus bulbs - I find one long cut using a sharp kitchen knife easier and can do less damage to the bulb than having to make a few passes with a small scalpel.



I first chopped the bulbs into quarters chopping some of the bigger sections in half once more then planted them into a pot of my standard just moist loam based potting mix.



I chose to leave it late into the season so the bulbs did not have too much time to rot in the compost before they started into growth and at the start of October I watered the pot.



As you can see on the left many of the sections appear to be making good leaf growth so I will continue to water this pot just as I do with the others regularly and in proportion to the amount of leaf growth.

It will only be at the end of the growing season next June or July that I find out if this method has been successful.



I am fascinated by flower buds and when they form – many such as **Crinodendron hookerianum** form their buds in the summer but in this case they look very vulnerable and exposed and unlike many other buds which are wrapped in multiple layers of scales to protect them through the winter.



Rhododendron thompsonii

The flower buds of Rhododendrons have also formed but these seem better prepared for the winter.



Rhododendron bureavii



Rhododendron decorum bud



Looking at a section of a Rhododendron bud we can see the woody base above which lies the complete flower truss in miniature surrounded by layers of bracts that will be shed as the flower emerges.



The rhododendron flowers are complete with all the parts fully formed in miniature just waiting until the season comes round for them start to expand bursting out of the bud as they mature. If that sounds familiar then look below and we see that bulbs have evolved a very similar strategy only using different parts.



The fully formed narcissus flowers wait in miniature wrapped in the modified leaf bases that forms the bulb – when the plant detects suitable growing conditions the flower will rapidly expand.



Rhododendron yakushimanum flower bud waits patiently until the growth is triggered by the spring.



Not all the buds have the patience to wait until spring - if the conditions are suitable some species will burst into flower in late summer or autumn.



Rhododendron is one of those that regularly give us flowers twice a year the main flowering in the spring plus a secondary lesser flowering in autumn when the second year leaves turn yellow as they prepare to drop.



Just as in the spring these autumn flowers can get hit by the frosts.



When we open the curtains in the morning we are greeted by the front garden in full autumn colour.



Front garden



I will round off this week with another view of the front garden featuring the forty year old cloud pruned tree which had its annual trim just a few weeks ago.....