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Bulb Log Diary

ISSN 2514-6114

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BULB LOG 39.....29th September 2021

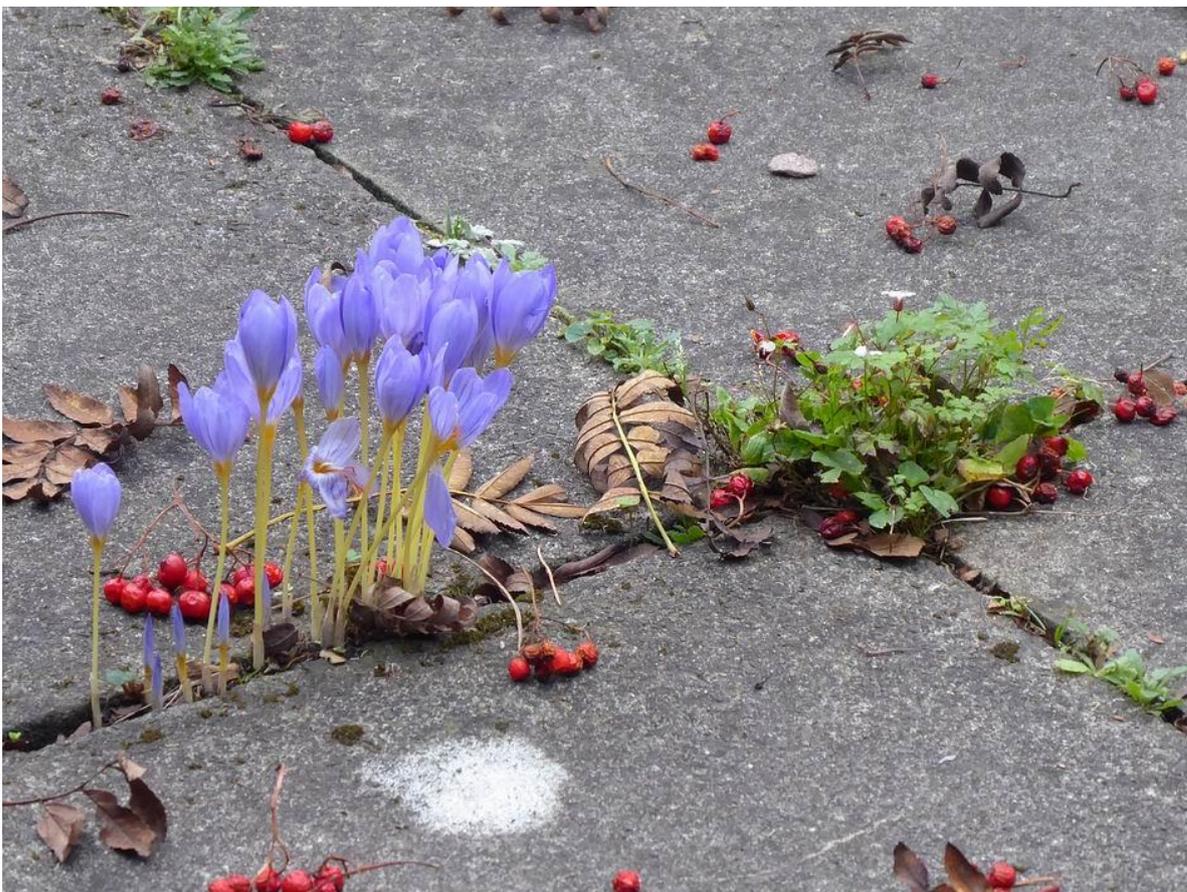


Crocus time



If we were in any doubt about the season, autumn struck this week with strong winds and heavy rain followed by some nice warm sunny days to please the gardeners and the autumn flowering bulbs. The Sorbus beside the trough area is always the first tree to shed its leaves - they just dry out, turn brown and fall off without going through the colourful autumn display that most of the other trees do. I have cleared this area of the leaves three times already

and there are still a few more yet to come down – the winds also ripped off nearly all the lovely red berries.



The area in the foreground that I have marked in the picture above is to showcase this group of autumn flowering Crocus growing in the very narrow crevice between the slabs.

The plant must have arrived as a single seed that dropped down the crack and year by year it has grown, increasing in numbers.



We refer to 'clumps' of crocus but due to these extreme conditions these corms could not cluster in the normal circular clump instead they have lined up to enable their flowers and subsequent leaves to get through the narrow gap between the slabs and reach up towards the light.



It never ceases to amaze me just how quickly these flowers grow - the next day, from the previous picture, most of the flowers that were in bud are fully formed and opening in the warm sunshine.



Looking down into the open flowers reveals the white pollen and markings around the throat– this is one of the hybrids that resulted from some seed I collected from our pot of *Crocus xantholaimos* and when the seedlings matured it was clear that the pollen parent was of a different species; either *Crocus kotschyanus* or *pulchellus*. These seedlings in turn set seeds that over the years have resulted in many of the plants that seed around our garden.

If, like us, you allow plants to seed around in your garden you will learn that plants will exploit many habitats that you, as a gardener, may not have considered, such as the cracks between the paving slabs. Paths are just another environment for opportunist bulbs. The narrow gravel path between two of our raised bulb beds is currently a ‘no walk area’ as it has been populated by a number of **Crocus nudiflorus** that have escaped from the beds.





Even in the beds **Crocus nudiflorus** will not be restrained, as it has long since escaped from the mesh baskets, both by stolons sent out from the corm and by seed, putting itself into every other basket in the plunge as well as into the path. It has proved to be a perfect companion because flowering in the autumn it grows perfectly well alongside the (mostly) Erythrונים in the other baskets without harming or competing with them when they flower in the spring.



Sometimes when the crocus flowers are closed it can seem like there are not that many but when it is warm enough for the flowers to open they expand demanding your attention especially when back light against a dark background.

The open flowers are also a magnet for late pollinators especially hoverflies.



The cobble stones that I laid on top of this sand bed have stopped the mice eating the corms and now the number of Crocus flowers increases each year as they both clump up and shed seed. With the plants growing up between the closely placed stones this could be described as an alternative form of crevice bed.

The combination of the warm weather and the large number of pollinators around at this time of year means we get a better seed set on the autumn flowering crocus than we do on the spring flowering ones when it is often still cold and very few flying insects have ventured out so early in the north.





So far I have shown Crocus growing happily in two types of crevice, between the slabs and the cobble stones now here is a **Crocus nudiflorus** that has chosen to grow in the vertical crevices of the raised wall where I have established (*Pseudo*)*Trillium rivale*. Gardeners can learn from nature: firstly by allowing the plants to seed naturally then by observing where the seedling plants choose to grow – it may not be where you would have chosen to plant them but nature will exploit many habitats in your garden where plants will grow that you have not utilised.



What covers the ground around the Crocus can greatly improve the habitat as well as improving the aesthetics – this scene would have looked better if only these Sorbus leaves had taken on the bright colours of autumn. In the wild the delicate floral tube that holds crocus flowers aloft would rise up through and be partially supported by the growth of surrounding plants or carpets of fallen leaves so we should imitate that in the garden.



Moss covered Sand bed

After many years of keeping the surface of this sand bed clear I eventually learned to accept the natural growth of

mosses and low growing 'weedy' subjects.



Rather than deterring the various bulbous plants from growing, the mossy environment has greatly improved the natural increase as the Crocus and Cyclamen seeds germinate and establish well in the moist conditions created by the moss.



Crocus nudiflorus

Many plants have detected the approaching winter so are shutting down, retreating underground where they will hide out from the cold, however the autumn flowering bulbs have evolved to take advantage of periods of fine autumn weather that also brings out masses of pollinating insects to feed and in doing so pollinate their flowers: the advantage is there is less competition than we see in the spring when so many plants are flowering.

On the rock garden bed we enjoy the flowers of many crocus and cyclamen species pushing up through and being supported by the yellowing leaves of Roscoea which share the bed with masses of other bulbs and plants that have been delighting us with a succession of flowers since January.





Crocus speciosus





You may wonder what a wall and trees has to do with crocus but read on. This large pine tree also sheds its old leaves in autumn the main difference being that the growth of new ones is already well established allowing the tree to be evergreen and for the last few years since I built the new bed beside the pond, and to the amusement of some of our neighbours, I have taken advantage and collected the pine needles from the road and pavement.



Two bags is enough, which it is easy to collect from the hard surface.



The Crocus flowers start to appear in the new bed beside the pond where last year's mulch of pine needles has broken down so it does not look as pleasing to my eye as it did, so I use the freshly gathered pine needles to mulch the bed and it instantly looks better as you will see in the following sequence of images.





In addition to giving this bed a more natural appearance the pine needle mulch helps support the crocus flowers.



From the left are **Crocus vallicola**, **banaticus** and **speciosus** in two colour forms.



Crocus vallicola



Crocus vallicola, banaticus and speciosus



Crocus banaticus

**Crocus banaticus
and speciosus**

Today as I write, Monday, it is windy and wet but during the past week we have enjoyed some lovey warm still sunny days during which we enjoyed viewing the different Crocus flowers opening and each day the scene varied as some flowers fell over while other shoots shot up to replace them. I took many pictures and it is difficult to select which ones to place here so I have erred on the generous side and decided to share lots of them.





Crocus banaticus



Crocus banaticus and speciosus



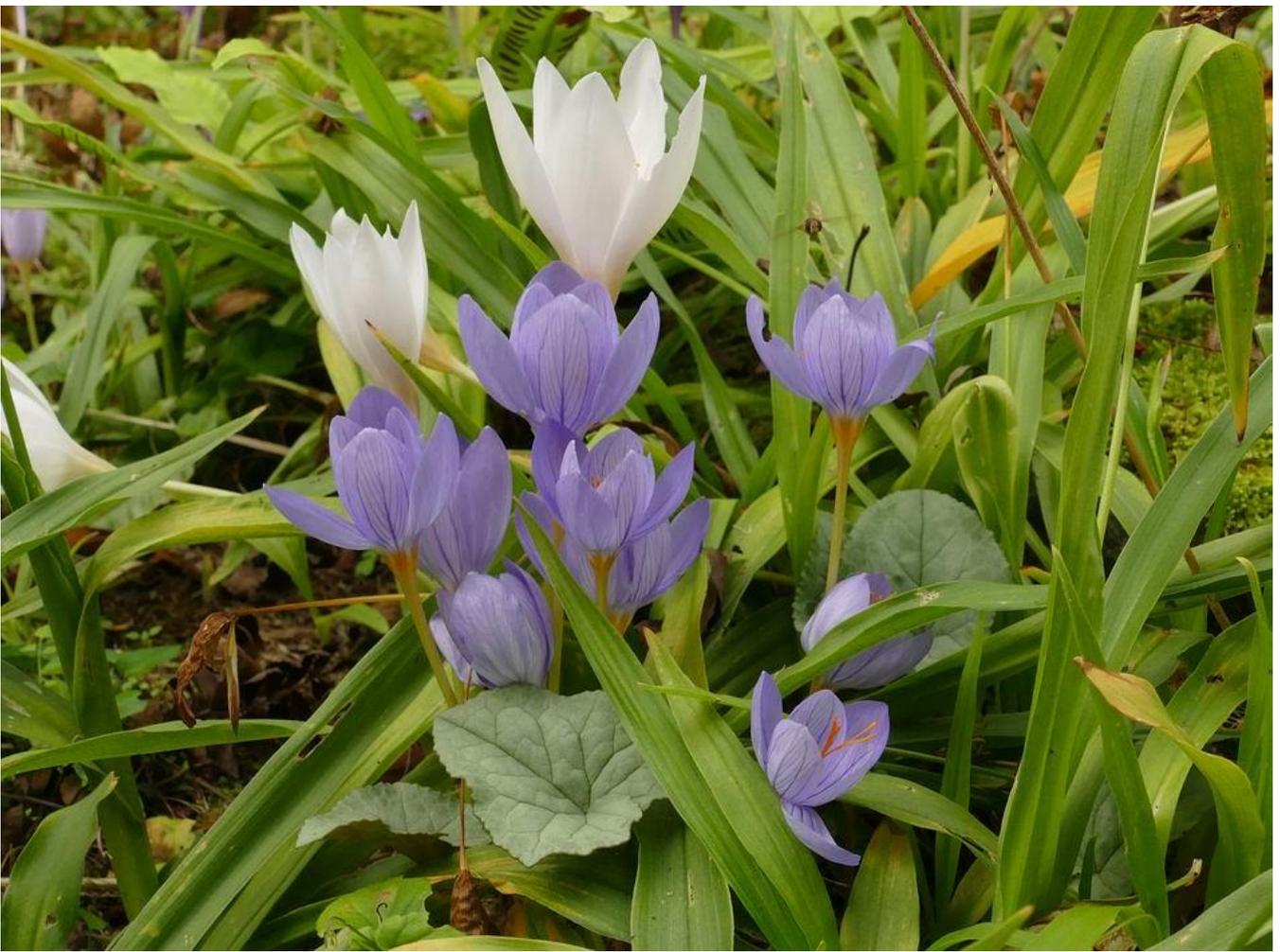
Crocus vallicola



Applying the pine needles is imitating nature's annual mulch of leaves: my intervention is just in selecting this type of leaves the shape and colour of which I think greatly enhance the aesthetic of this bed.







Moving to another bed once more the Crocus flowers are pushing up through the leaves in imitation of nature: my intervention is in the selection of the plants and the leaves of these smaller species of Roscoea make an ideal support and foil for the emerging new growth of Crocus and Cyclamen.



Allow your plants the freedom to choose where they want to grow, even if that is in the middle of a path.



Crocus banaticus and speciosus

The autumn flowering bulbs are often called 'late flowering bulbs', the late referring to the time of year, however in reality they are the early risers being the first flowers to appear on the new seasons corms while most of the others hold on to their flowers until the spring.....