



BULB LOG 30.....24th July 2013



Allium prattii

I am keen to build on the number of Alliums we grow, especially those that flower through the summer, to help extend the flowering season of bulbs in our garden. Allium prattii is very happy seeding itself around the gravel beds with the slightly later flowering Allium wallichii whose leaves you can see to the left of the picture.



Allium tauricola

We just acquired this superb dwarf onion from [Pottertons Nursery](#) – it is a great size for a trough or raised bed.

Below is another species of similar stature that I was given last year - Allium kurtzianum.

I do not know if these

species will hybridise but I have been fertilising both plants using the same brush in the hope that I can get some seed.



Allium kurtzianum



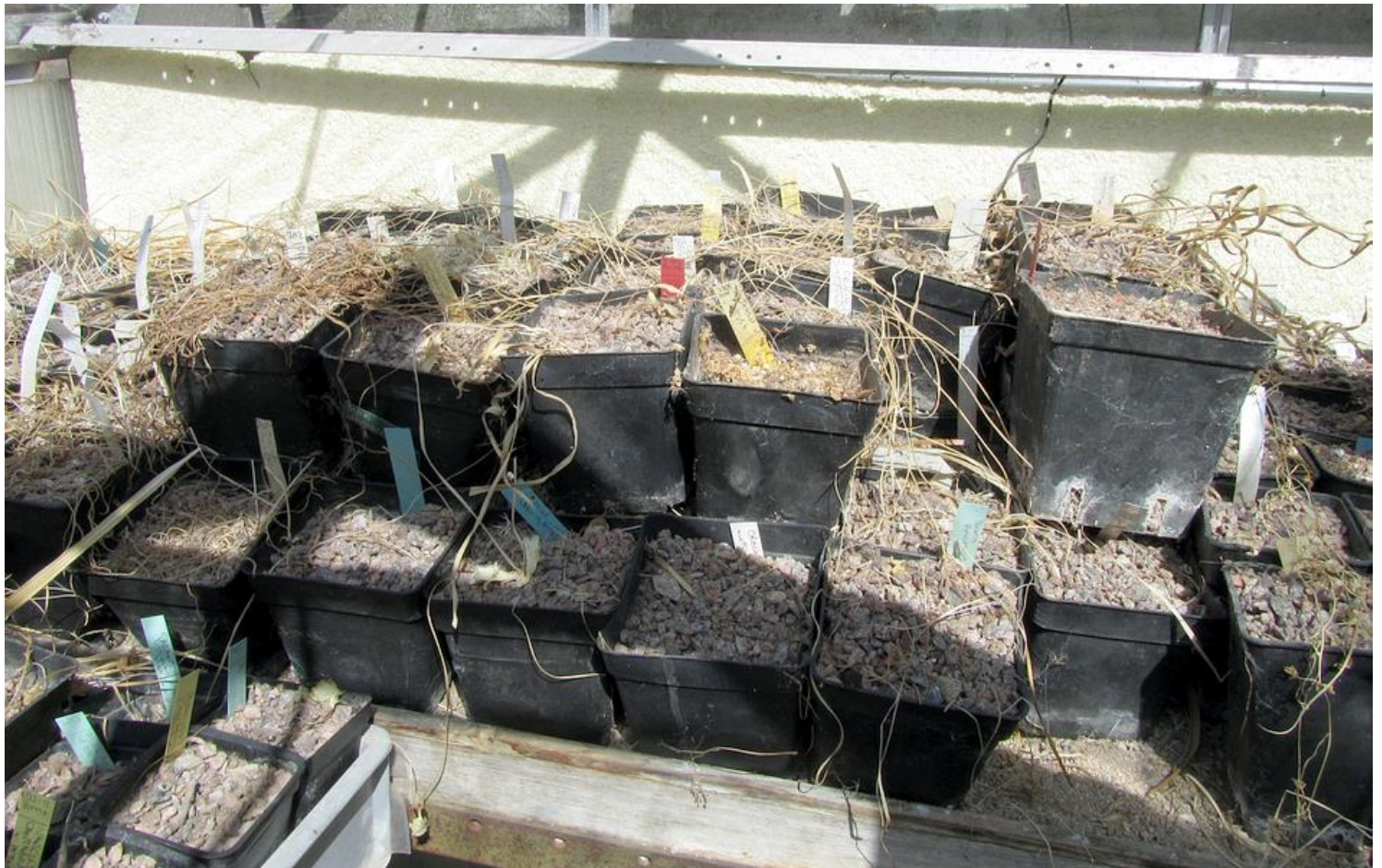
Bulb house

I have not started re-potting the bulb house for a few reasons. First it has been so hot that we could not stand to be under the glass – we cannot say that the bulbs will not have had sufficient heat to ripen the buds this year. I will be interested to see how our Sternbergias, which need a good ripening period, flower this autumn.



Plunge staging

The main reason is that for a few years we have been watching the metal support of our home built staging get more and more rusty. I built it out of recycled materials over twenty five years ago and it has served us well but now the strength must be compromised by this corrosion. I estimate that there is a load of around 1.5 - 2 tonnes when all the pots are watered and I fear if we do nothing that a collapse is certain.



All the pots have been moved and stacked up in one of the other glasshouses while we strip out the old staging.



All the sand has been removed to reveal the original structure. The wire mesh was covered in polythene sheet to hold the sand – remarkably the polythene has lasted well for most of the 25 years but was pretty degraded and brittle as we removed it. We now have to cut out the old staging, remove all the clutter, sort out the old electrics then build up a new set of plunge benches which I will reveal in coming weeks.



Erythronium and Crocus basket

Yes, look carefully and you will see that I have planted both Erythronium bulbs and Crocus corms in this basket.



Crocus nudiflorus 'Orla' corms

I grow the white form of *Crocus nudiflorus* in a basket plunged in the same frame. Many of you will know this species sends out stolons placing young corms some distance from the parent to colonise the ground around the original corm. Over the years since we last managed to re-plant these plunges 'Orla' corms have established a wide territory growing in both the sand and adjacent baskets. As the corms are easily distinguished from the

Erythroniums and given that they flower at completely different seasons I am happy to allow this decision of nature to remain.



***Crocus nudiflorus* 'Orla' corms**

Despite the hot dry conditions many a bulb will be making new roots as you see in these corms which not only have new roots but the flowering shoot is extending from the top of the corm while stolons emerge from near the base. It is essential to ensure that these roots are not damaged or allowed to dry out so I planted them into slightly moist compost and will give them water once they are plunged back into the frame.



***Crocus pelistericus* seed pods**



Crocus pelistericus seed pods

I am always delighted to get seed on our bulbs so that I can raise a new generation of mixed clones helping us to maintain a young, vigorous and healthy stock of plants. Like many Crocus the seed pods remain under ground for a long time after the flowers have faded. Eventually the stems elongate, pushing these seed pods up to shed their precious contents. I only noticed the seeds as I went to re-pot this basket so I left it for a few days in which time the stems grew by 7cms. Crocus pelistericus has the tallest stems as the seed ripens of all the species that we grow.



Crocus pelistericus seed

A close look at the seeds which I sowed immediately into a moist, sandy compost.



Crocus pelistericus

Crocus pelistericus is never dormant in our garden as the leaves remain green well into the autumn, even in this hot summer. The new roots, which can start to emerge as early as June, are well developed. After a few years each corm will be surrounded by a cluster of offsets which are best removed to prevent congestion.



Having carefully replanted the largest corms to minimise damage to the roots or the leaves I am left with a number of offsets to plant elsewhere. Many of these will flower after one more year of growth.

Fritillaria pyrenaica

Here a basket of *Fritillaria* has also been colonised by *Crocus* 'Orla'. There is no danger of not being able to separate the very different bulbs if we wanted to.

Growing them together gives us *Crocus* flowers in the autumn and *Fritillaria* flowers in the spring.



I carefully space the corms and bulbs out in their shared basket.



Fritillaria pyrenaica bulbs

Fritillaria pyrenaica bulbs, when growing well, will produce two flowering stems each with a new bulb forming at the base giving a steady doubling of numbers. If for any reason, such as rot, a bulb does not grow it will often form a number of offsets on the good remains of the scales. The bulb on the right shows that one scale has rotted destroying the main growth bud so the plant has gone into survival mode and many other otherwise dormant buds on the healthy sections of the scales have developed into bulbils.



Fritillaria affinis

Some bulbs cover themselves in rice grain which when removed can be grown on to form bulbs increasing your stock. I believe that rice grains have evolved as an insurance so that should the parent bulb rot or be destroyed the plant has plenty small offsets allowing this clone to survive into the future. This rice grain type of bulb has a more developed survival system than those like F. pyrenaica where multiple offsets only form if the main bulb is damaged.



Fritillaria affinis

A lesson that I have learned from observing the bulbs growing in our garden is that these rice grain type of bulbs seem to grow best if planted very near the surface. As they produce lots of rice grains they tend to appear all over the garden where I spread old potting compost – a perfect example of how successful this strategy is. When left undisturbed for a number of years they always grow close to the surface like the one above.



***Fritillaria camschatensis* bulbs**



Fritillaria camschatensis (Eurasian form)

Fritillaria camschatensis is another bulb that is surrounded by loosely attached rice grain-like scales. If these grains remain attached to the main bulb and it grows normally then the rice grains will die off at the end of the season as you will see in the picture above. Whether these grains just die or the food stored is absorbed back into the new forming bulb I am not sure. You can remove some of the outside grains without affecting the vigour of the main plant; these can be grown on separately to form new bulbs. Note also how the previous seasons roots remain alive on this species for a long time so do not let them dry out excessively.

**Fritillaria
camschatensis
'Tomari'**

Some forms of this species like 'Tomari' from Janis Ruksans produce stolons around the base of the bulb. This is a good adaptation to ensure that offsets grow a short distance away from the parent reducing the problems of congested clumps of bulbs having to compete for moisture and nutrient.





***Dicentra cucullaria* 'Pink Punk'**

Dicentra cucullaria has a bulb of very similar form to these rice grain *Fritillaria* where a cluster of many small scales cluster around the larger scales of the bulb. Once more I have eventually learned that they want to grow just below the surface. For many years I re-potted this plant every year to help me build up a stock and every year I planted it about one third of the way up from the bottom of the pot – I could never understand how it grew so well but did not flower. Then after it was not replanted for a number of years it started to flower wonderfully – when I did eventually tip the basket out I discovered all the bulbs had worked their way up to just below the mulch - at last I learned the lesson.



***Dicentra cucullaria* 'Pink Punk'**

Nature and the plants give us so much advice on how best to grow them if only we can observe and interpret the lessons the correct way. In the garden and left to its own devices *Dicentra cucullaria* grows almost on the surface.



Allium sikkimense

Some more Allium flowers and a bit of colour to finish off this week with the small deep blue Allium sikkimense above and another picture of Allium prattii below.....

