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# Bulb Log Diary

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BULB LOG 40.....30<sup>th</sup> September 2020



Crocus and Colchicum



The cover image holds clues to the past week, the Colchicum and Crocus tell us this is autumn : the fact that many flowers are lying across the ground is evidence of the strong winds which snapped them over and is also responsible for ripping clusters of Sorbus berries prematurely from the trees. What appears to be like dried grass is the foliage of Crocus pelistericus which is only now dying back after a long season of growth.



**Colchicum illyricum ex Drake**, that we received from Mark Smyth, started flowering in the sand bed a month ago before I did any watering in the bulb houses.



Within days of the first storm many of the bulbs responded to the presence of water by going into a rapid growth phase with the first leaves appearing.





I love it when I see cracks like this appearing on the surface because they indicate the imminent appearance of shoots. As the clusters of new season's growth rise up they push the surface cracking the sand – this also happens in the pots. I did not have to wait long to find out what was causing this eruption as shown in the image below.



A cluster of *Scilla lingulata* leaves with a *Crocus nudiflorus* flower rising through the centre.





Just as I expected, the growth has accelerated since I watered the bulb houses: the rapid growth of the leaves is obvious - this will also be mirrored below by the root growth so it is essential to make sure that there is sufficient water to support the production of new cells. Having started the bulbs into rapid growth with the first storm I need to ensure they do not dry out so I will be watering the pots showing leaf growth. Because of the mild sunny weather I have been watering the bulbs, especially those in growth, before I apply the second general storm on the 1<sup>st</sup> October.

A general rule is to water in proportion to the amount of leaf growth appearing. The pots/plants with most leaf growth will require more watering; the pots not showing any growth may not require any additional water.

As well as requiring water to fuel the rapid growth the leaves also lose water through transpiration plus the sand and pots can get dry simply by evaporation so I



need to observe and water accordingly especially in the warmer days.





**Sternbergia sicula**  
For so many years I have struggled to get flowers on the Sternbergia - they grow and increase but rarely produce flowers. I have tried everything such as different feeding regimes, repotting every year, letting them get pot bound without success. When I created the sand beds I planted some of the smaller offset Sternbergia bulbs directly into the sand and within a few years they were flowering and unlike those confined to pots forming clumps of flowering bulbs.



**Sternbergia sicula**

Although I am delighted to be getting regular flowers I will not be satisfied until I understand the reason why those in the sand are flowering while those in pots are not. My initial speculation is that because they get more or less the same watering/feeding regime in both the pots and sand the flowering could be down to the extra freedom their roots have in the sand bed.





***Sternbergia lutea***







There is good leaf growth in these pots of *Sternbergia lutea* and *sicula* but no flowers so I will be transferring more of these over to the sand beds.



Gardening is all about creating habitats that plants can adapt to and I have constantly experimented with many variations. First working out how to grow bulbs in clay pots plunged in sand then moving on to plastic pots placed on a bed of sand before converting some of the plunges to sand beds where I grow the bulbs directly in the sand.

It was observing the way that occasional bulb seed falling in the sand around the pots germinated and grew much better than the seed I sowed in pots pointed me in the direction of the sand beds.

Last year and this I scattered

a lot of the bulb seed directly back into the sand beds as it ripened - especially the later flowering *Alliums* and *Triteleia* - I did think that if they all grew it could get overcrowded. One morning looking out the window towards the bulb houses I observed some of the garden population of house sparrows, around 15 of them, the very ones that I wrote enjoyed having dust baths in the dry sand, were now going over the sand eagerly eating the seeds I had recently scattered. I had wondered why I had not seen more of last year's seed germinating: now I know why.





Many of the Crocus flowers in the cobble bed are going over, some battered by the strong winds that persisted all weekend but nature brings beauty even as the flowers disintegrate.



**Crocus pulchellus**





***Crocus serotinus***



***Crocus vallicola* and *Crocus nudiflorus albus***





I often show pictures of **Saxifraga brunonis** which mostly delivers beauty in the form of its foliage and multiple bright red stolons.

This is it in full flower and I find it impossible to capture photographically the presence that this plant has. The flowers are small and appear sporadically on stems but appearing late in the year they capture your eye drawing me in to examine the beauty in their detail.



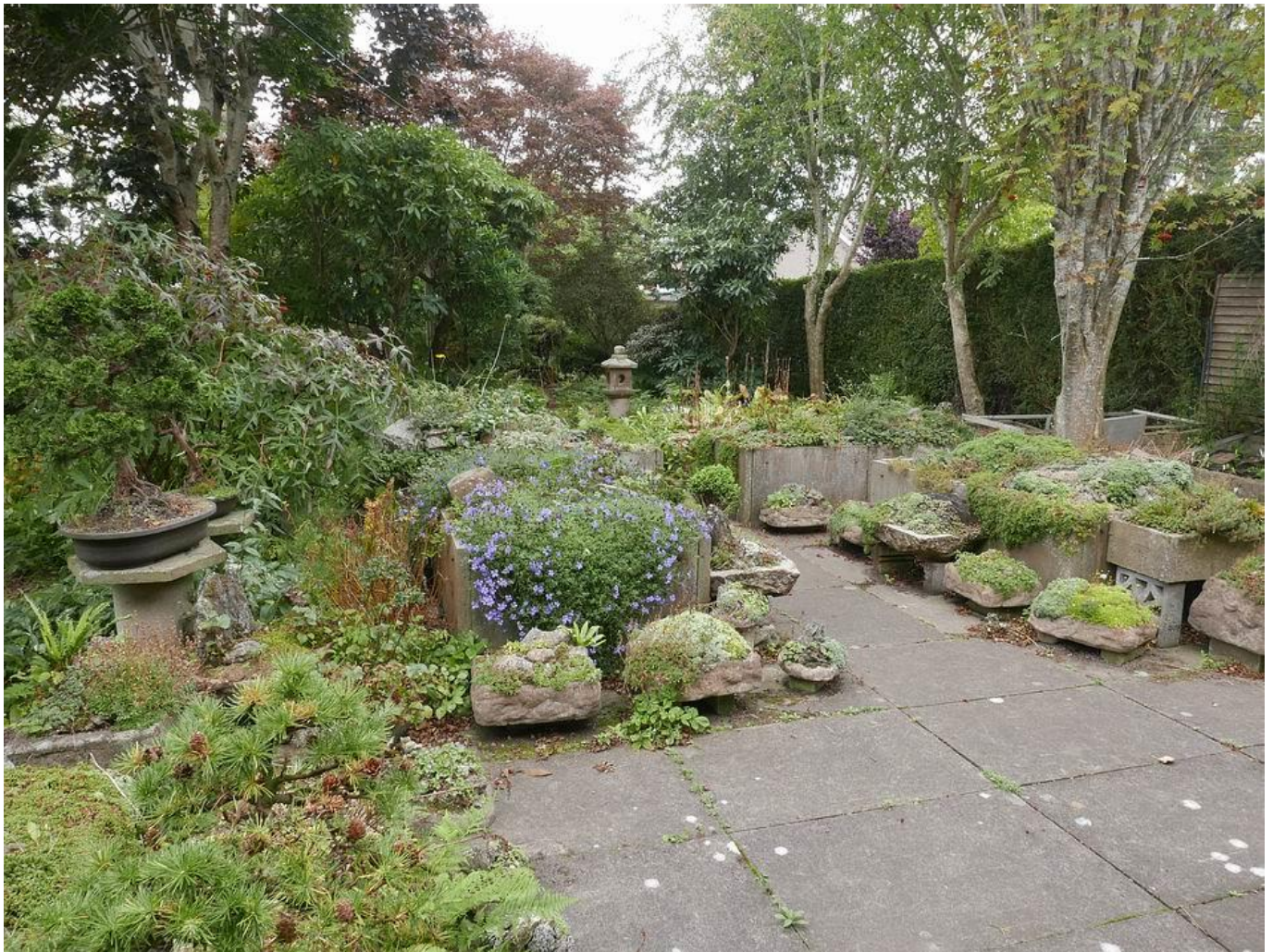


Another plant growing in a trough that is capturing my attention is this **Cymbalaria muralis** flowering yet again.



Growing in the smallest of troughs in a habitat made of broken concrete and sharp sand it has rarely been without a flower since spring. Its common name is the Ivy Leafed Toadflax and I planted it alongside a tiny form of *Hedera helix* the leaves of which can be seen peaking though.





View across the trough and slab bed area.



Although the temperatures have fallen to zero the frosts have not been hard or long enough to send this **Cyananthus lobatus hybrid** into retreat – it continues to flower as do the plants of *Cyananthus microphyllus* growing in the same bed and shown below.





**Cyananthus microphyllus**



Further up the garden I come across another autumn blue in the form of **Gentiana asclepiadea** the Willow Gentian.





The frilly white flowers of **Veratrum fimbriatum** also continue to open both in the back garden, above, and the front garden below.



**Veratrum fimbriatum**





***Roscoeia purpurea* f. *rubra* 'Red Gurkha'**



***Podophyllum hexandrum* fruits.**





**Colchicum speciosum**

The flowers of the autumn flowering Crocus and Colchicum continue pushing up through the ever increasing chaos of the collapsing herbaceous plant foliage.



**Colchicum speciosum album**





**Colchicum  
speciosum  
album**



**Colchicum**





**Crocus pulchellus**







**Crocus banaticus, nudiflorus and vallicola**



As I finish writing on Tuesday 29<sup>th</sup> September, the strong winds have passed and sunshine bathes the garden bringing the tiny area of woodland we have created to life both with the plants such as the beautiful autumn flowering bulbs opening in the warm light, plus all the birds we have feeding in the garden including large groups of Coal, Blue and Great Tits which have joined the regular gang of Sparrows with the Geese flying overhead returning from the far north to over winter – this is our sanctuary.....