SRGC ----- Bulb Log Diary -----

BULB LOG 10…….....11th March 2009

Narcissus perez - chiscano

This is my pot of Narcissus perez – chiscano that I first showed a few weeks back- now with the flowers fully open - they are seed raised and the pollen parent was supposed to be Narcissus cyclamineus. The proper way to ensure that you get a hybrid cross entails removing the anthers from the seed parent before they dehisce add the pollen from the pollen parent then cover the fertilised flower with a muslin bag to prevent any further fertilisation. I do not go to those lengths and play the gambling game by just transferring the pollen from one flower to the other – I usually do the cross both ways. By leaving things to chance I am never sure what I might get until I see the flowers and even then it is not always clear that I have been successful in creating a hybrid. I am certain that I see the influence of the swept back petals of N. cyclamineus in a few of these flowers but I am not sure about the rest. It is perfectly possible to have a mixture of hybrids and species from the same seed set. I am waiting for my original pot of Narcissus perez –chiscano to flower so that I can compare them.

Narcissus 'Candlepower' x asturiensis

These are two hybrids made by Brian Duncan between Narcissus 'Candlepower' and N. asturiensis. This cross is on the left while the one on the right is the reverse cross- N. asturiensis x Narcissus 'Candlepower'.

Some of you might well ask why we make hybrids when the species are so beautiful? I agree that it is impossible to improve on the beauty that nature provided us with but where we can help is by making plants more growable in a wide range of garden conditions and also speed up the rate of increase by division. Many of the most beautiful bulbs do not increase vegetatively or do so very slowly but hybrids with those species can inherit

hybrid vigour where they increase at a good rate and so can become more widely available at a reasonable price for everyone and that to me is a great bonus.

Narcissus cyclamineus x 'Mini Cycla'

One of the oldest hybrids between N. asturiensis and N. cyclamineus is N.'Mini Cycla'. I have grown it for a long time but never find it to be that robust a plant – it increases well for a few years then goes backwards. I decided to cross it back onto N. cyclamineus and this is the result. It is now two thirds cyclamineus and one third asturiensis and as a result the petals are swept back a bit more than those of 'Mini Cycla' but not as far back as in N. Cyclamineus.

Narcissus x 'Mini Cycla'

Narcissus cyclamineus

Narcissus asturiensis

Narcissus asturiensis is among the finest of the small trumpet daffodils and comes in a ranges of sizes from plants with a stem no taller than a match stick to taller versions like N, 'Cedric Morris' whose stem can reach 15cms. Some like the one on the left have a stem that is not upright but grows at an angle of around 45 degrees making them look even shorter. They are perfectly hardy but because of their compact nature are best grown in pots, a trough or a raised bed where you can enjoy them and protect them from slugs.

A selection of flowers of Narcissus asturiensis.

Narcissus asturiensis and jacetanus

Another entity in this superb group of dwarf species is Narcissus jacetanus which is very similar to N. asturiensis with only a few botanical differences that not even all the botanists can agree on. The flower on the left is N.asturiensis and the rest are N. jacetanus.

I should mention that this bulb log and next week's are not quite as up to date as normal. As this is being posted I am hopefully flying across the North Atlantic Ocean heading out to speak at the NARGS Western Study Weekend in Portland Oregon. After that I am heading south and east to Denver Colorado where I will be speaking at the Botanic Garden.
So to ensure continuity and that there is a bulb log added every week I have prepared bulb logs 10 and 11 in advance.

Corydalis Seedlings

Here are a number of pots of Corydalis seedlings flowering for their second year. They were all raised from our own seeds and I fertilised the flowers with a paint brush to ensure a seed set. In many cases I only had a single clone initially.

It is said that many Corydalis are not self compatible- I am not so sure. While I think it possible that there might be some species that cannot be selfed I think the lack of seed from a single clone is more to do with the fact that there are few pollinators around this early in the year that can pollinate such a specialised flower as this.

I have now to study the books and key out these seedlings to see if they are true species or perhaps they have hybridised with each other as I did not follow correct procedure and sterilise my brush between plants. I just gave it a wipe so it is possible that I transferred some pollen between the species. I know that the one labelled Corydalis ?? nudicaulis below is wrong and maybe the result of a label being misplaced as I cannot see it being close to that species.

Corydalis ?? nudicaulis

Corydalis wendelbo

Corydalis oppositifolia kurdica

Corydalis paschei

Crocus dalmaticus

Crocus carpetanus

Crocus carpetanus is an interesting species, not that any of them are particular uninteresting! It differs from all other crocus species by the lack of a keel and the presence of several minor grooves on the leaf – the typical Crocus leaf has a flattened keel between two deep grooves. C. nevadensis would appear to be the nearest relative and it has a less well developed keel than the other Crocus leaves. In many ways the leaves on Crocus carpetanus remind me a bit of some Romulea leaves.

Crocus carpetanus flowers

Potash time

With many of the Narcissus flowers now going over I have decided it is time to start the supplementary potassium feed by adding some soluble potash to the surface of the pots and watering through it.

I would normally wait a week or so yet but because I am going away (I am away as you are reading this) and as many of the bulbs will need watering before I go I decided to go for it now. I have mentioned previously that since I have switched over to growing the bulbs in plastic pots they only need watered about half as often as they did when they were in plunged clay pots. This means my opportunity to add the supplementary feed is also reduced by about half so I cannot forget it.

As the flowers are going over the narcissus bulbs will start to divert the nutrients to building up their bulbs and the most important nutrient for that is potassium. If they have been successfully fertilised they will also use some energy up making seeds but the fertile ones will also grow on for four to six weeks longer than those that are not setting seed. That extra period of growth more than makes up for the energy used making the seeds which are in my mind the most valuable crop anyway.

Erythronium japonicum seedlings

Oh joy: Erythronium time approaches as these E. japonicum seedlings indicate. The nearest ones are just germinating while the more mature shaped leaf germinated last year. All these are from our own garden collected seeds.

Erythronium caucasicum seed germinating

More great news here: this pot of Erythronium caucasicum seeds of wild origin are also germinating well.

Erythronium caucasicum

Erythronium caucasicum flowering in our garden where it is as easy to grow as is its near relative E. dens canis but it is a scarce plant and rarely seen offered as either seed or bulbs – my advice is, if you see it, grab it.

Erythronium caucasicum

Erythronium sibericum altaicum