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

BULB LOG 39…..……30th September 2009

Arisaema nepenthoides seed head

The first colours of autumn are appearing and none are brighter or more welcome than the bright red multi-berried seed heads on the Arisaema.

I am particularly pleased to see this fine fruiting head on Arisaema nepenthoides because I have in the past lost this plant to late spring frosts. Luckily I have always had a pot of seedlings coming on and managed to replace the losses in the garden.

I will clean these seeds soon and store them until I sow them in January. I find it strange that no birds, insects or animals are attracted to these colourful seeds in our garden ;if I do not collect them they just lie where they fall on top of the ground and germinate in a cluster.

Cyclamen mirabile

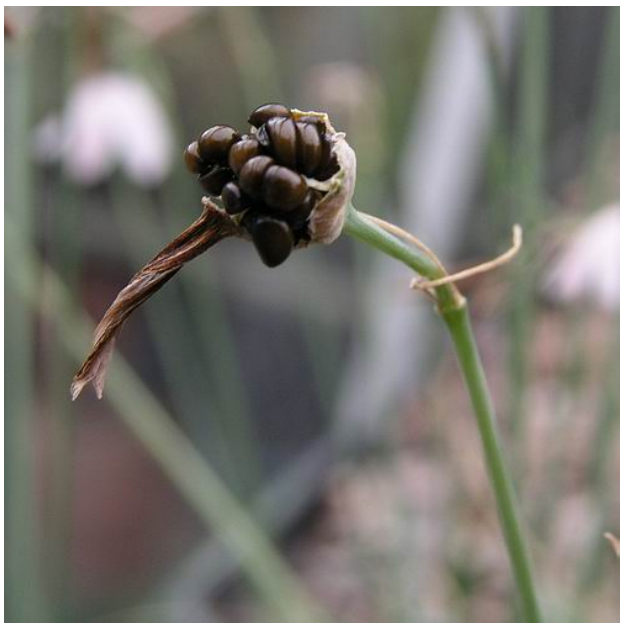
Another of my favourite plants that I always collect and sow the seed of is Cyclamen mirabile so I am pleased to see that at least some of the flowers have been fertilised.
It is easy to identify the flowers that have been fertilised because the stems recoil pulling the seed head down towards the ground where they are better protected until they ripen next summer.

Cyclamen mirabile

The flowers stems that have not been successfully pollinated can be identified by the way they just wither and fall over rather than recoiling – there are two visible in the picture above.

Cyclamen mirabile

To minimise the risk of rot attacking the congested top of the corm where all the flower and leaf stems arise, these wilting stems should be plucked off with a sharp upwards jerk.



Acis (Leucojum) roseum seed head

The only autumn flowering bulb that I know which ripens and sheds its seeds in the autumn immediately after flowering is Leucojum roseum.

I have tried sowing these seeds in the autumn but they have never germinated before the following spring. I suspect they need a cold period to trigger germination.

Crocus laevigatus seeds

Now is the optimum time to sow my bulb seeds which have stored since they ripened..

Crocus laevigatus seeds

They have been stored, mixed with dry sand, in polythene pockets to help keep them from drying out too much. As I have described before I sow all my Crocus seeds at depth at least half way down the pot. This method gives me an excellent germination rate and produces flowering corms one year quicker than sowing the same seeds in the traditional way on the surface and just covering them with a layer of gravel.

Crocus serotinus salzmannii and Crocus hadriaticus

Crocus species are still appearing and above are Crocus serotinus salzmannii and a beautiful dark purple-tubed form Crocus hadriaticus – both received from SRGC forumists in recent years.

Crocus hadriaticus

I have several forms of Crocus hadriaticus growing in pots in the bulb houses where they and I can enjoy the autumn sunshine. If you look at the flower to the right you will see there are a number of further flowering shoots appearing from the same corm. Healthy corms can send up a number of flowering shoots and a new corm should form at the base of each of these stems meaning that if I get my horticulture correct thorough the growing season I should have a good increase in this pot.

Crocus speciosus xantholaimos

People often think I am mad when I say that my bulbs talk to me but I can assure you that I am not and that they do. What are these flowers telling you? By the floppy petals and their slightly shrivelled look they are telling me that they are short of moisture. My basic regime calls for the first storm to be given on the 1st September; second storm to be applied on the 1st October but that is a general rule. This past month we have had some very hot sunny weather resulting in more evaporation than normal so the pots are just starting to dry out enough to require watering again.

Last weekend I gave all the pots in the bulb houses their second storm thoroughly soaking them all even the ones with no visible signs of growth. Having started the bulbs off it is extremely important that, in order to prevent damage to the emerging roots, you do not let them dry out completely. After the second storm I will water in proportion to the amount of leaf growth so I apply copious quantities of water to those with leaves and no further water to those with no leaves. Crocus flowers do not count as they can appear some time before the leaves appear so wait until you see the leaves before watering again after the second storm. Having stated my basic two storm regime it is vital that the pots do not dry out so in hot areas with high evaporation rates you may have to water again.

Narcissus leaves appearing

When I hear gardeners asking what is your rainfall I always answer by saying that it is not the rainfall that is the most critical factor to the plants but the evaporation rate. You could live in an area of high rainfall that also has hot windy conditions that removes the water as quickly as it falls or you can live in an area of moderate rainfall (approx1000mm) like us where the temperatures are cool so most of the rain stays in the ground. The same is true under glass - how often you need to water will depend on your temperatures, your potting medium, the type of pots, how they are plunged, etc. etc. All these pots have now had their second storm and I have just to water the Fritillaria in the frit house, which I will be doing this week, as I now leave them dry for four weeks longer than the Crocus, Narcissus and the like.

Crocus banaticus

It is generally easier with the bulbs in the garden as they just take the rainfall when nature provides it but then they are also at risk from the damaging effect of the wind as well as slugs and snails.

Giant conifer aphids

A friend showed me these Giant conifer aphids and believe me they are well named as they are huge when compared to the size of our normal aphids. They are an alien Cinara species that is causing much damage to conifer plantations and garden conifers.

The two black spots on their back are called cornicles which form a part of the insects defensive system as they exude cornicle wax (Triacylglycerols), a quick hardening defensive fluid.

Winged Giant conifer aphid

Aphids are fascinating creatures as when the population on a plant reaches a certain density a winged generation is born to fly to a new food source.

Aphids

I photographed these aphids on a public planting of Roses just around the corner form our home- notice the winged individual? Look carefully at their backs and you will see that their cornicles appear as a pair of spines -the different colour of their bodies just reflects the sap they have been sucking. The point of showing you these is to raise your awareness that aphids are about and looking for nice fresh new leaves to suck the sap from. With all the new leaves appearing on the bulbs I will be watching carefully for any aphids.

Narcissus serotinus

Both of the flowers on my Narcissus serotinus are now open.

Corydalis ‘Craigton Blue’

Finally for this week I share this scene of a small group of Corydalis ‘Craigton Blue’ still with some flowers on.