



BULB LOG 314th August 2010



Rhodohypoxis baurei flowers

This picture illustrates some of the variations in colour that we have in our Rhodohypoxis flowers.



Rhodohypoxis 'Fred Broome'

The trough in the foreground is full of the cultivar Rhodohypoxis 'Fred Broome' which is a very good readily available vigorous clone. To me there is a danger that cultivated plants are becoming increasingly dominated by

strong clones like this that are easily increased on a large scale to satisfy the mass market. The long term result of this is that we would lose the variation in colour, form and vigour that the natural species possess. I have never found any seeds on 'Fred Broome' so suspect that it is not very fertile so by itself it is an evolutionary dead end. The troughs in the background contain some of my own seedlings and these do produce viable seeds.



Rhodohypoxis seeds

You have to be quick and observant to collect the Rhodohypoxis seed because it is as the flower fades and falls away, taking with it the top of the seed capsule, that the seeds are shed.



I am always going on about raising your plants from seed because I do believe that it is the only way to help preserve and maintain the wide variation of the plants that we have in our gardens and it is our responsibility as gardeners to look after this valuable heritage. This is especially so as the introduction of seeds from the wild is becoming increasingly difficult both politically and due to the loss of plants in the wild - largely due to the destruction of wild habitats. How often is the plant protected but the habitat that it grows in is not? It could well be the case that

many plants will only be represented by their cultivated forms as they become extinct in the wild. I will sow these Rhodohypoxis seeds in the winter to help maintain a healthy stock with as much variation as I can.



Tulipa saxatilis

Being observant is one of the best attributes that a gardener can have as so often the plants will indicate to us how they want to be grown if we can only recognise the signs.

I think the signs that these small *Tulipa saxatilis* bulbs are giving me is very clear – they want to be planted deeper.

The depth that a bulb should be planted can vary according to conditions and it is worth asking the questions are these bulbs going deeper to get cooler and/or moister conditions? Or do they like being deeper whatever the conditions are? Perhaps they have evolved in such conditions that they have such a strong genetic desire to get deep into the soil which cannot be overridden in cultivation.

I have obliged with these bulbs as I have now planted them out into my 'hot' south facing bed where a number of other Tulips have been growing well.



Eucomis autumnalis

I bought a few new *Eucomis autumnalis* bulbs at the Early Bulb day and as the weather was not very good at the time- we were under deep snow- I planted them into pots and kept them under the staging in the bulb house. The bulbs were really big with offsets and even when planted as deep as I could in the pots I could see the nose sticking out. This made it easy to tell when I should start to water them – as soon as the leaves started to show.



Having placed the pots outside in June they have grown well so I decided it was best to get them planted out now. The other good thing about leaving the planting to now is that I can pick a spot in a bed that has no other plant in active growth – of course I have to dig a hole very carefully as there are many other bulbs and plants packed into these beds.



Eucomis bicolor

I already have some *Eucomis bicolor* that are well established and growing well in another part of this bed: they came through our hard winter and are increasing in size: this one has two flowering crowns now.

One of the best bits of advice you can give a new gardener, apart from grow you plants from seed, is to buy a few plants that are in flower every month then you will have a longer period of flowering interest than you would if they bought heaps of flowering plants on a single spree.



Primula florindae seedlings

I have always wanted to create beds that have interest all year round and call the system I use my 'High Rise' or 'Time Share' gardening where a number of plants that have different but compatible growth cycles can share the same planting space. I am often asked at my talks how I work out what to plant together and my answer has to come back to observing the plants that you see and working it out for

yourself. I showed these self sown seedlings of *Primula florindae* last week and now I am lifting them because I have decided that they will provide valuable flowering interest in the same bulb bed in which I just planted the *Eucomis*. This bed is full of spring flowering bulbs and starts off with *Galanthus* in February then after the bulbs are over a number of other plants give interest in the early summer like some species *Delphiniums* which have now gone dormant leaving plenty of space above ground at least.



Primula florindae seedlings

With all the rain we have been experiencing lately the ground is very moist and the seedlings are nice and turgid and growing strongly so they should not suffer from being carefully transplanted.



Bulb Bed

For plants to fit into my 'time share' system they have to satisfy a few conditions: first, they cannot have too vigorous or hungry a root system; they must go dormant or have a resting period when other plants can use the space and they must like growing conditions that are compatible with the other plants in the bed. *Primula florindae* meets these criteria and will give us a nice display of flowers in this bulb bed while other plants are sleeping gently below ground waiting for their turn to make a display.



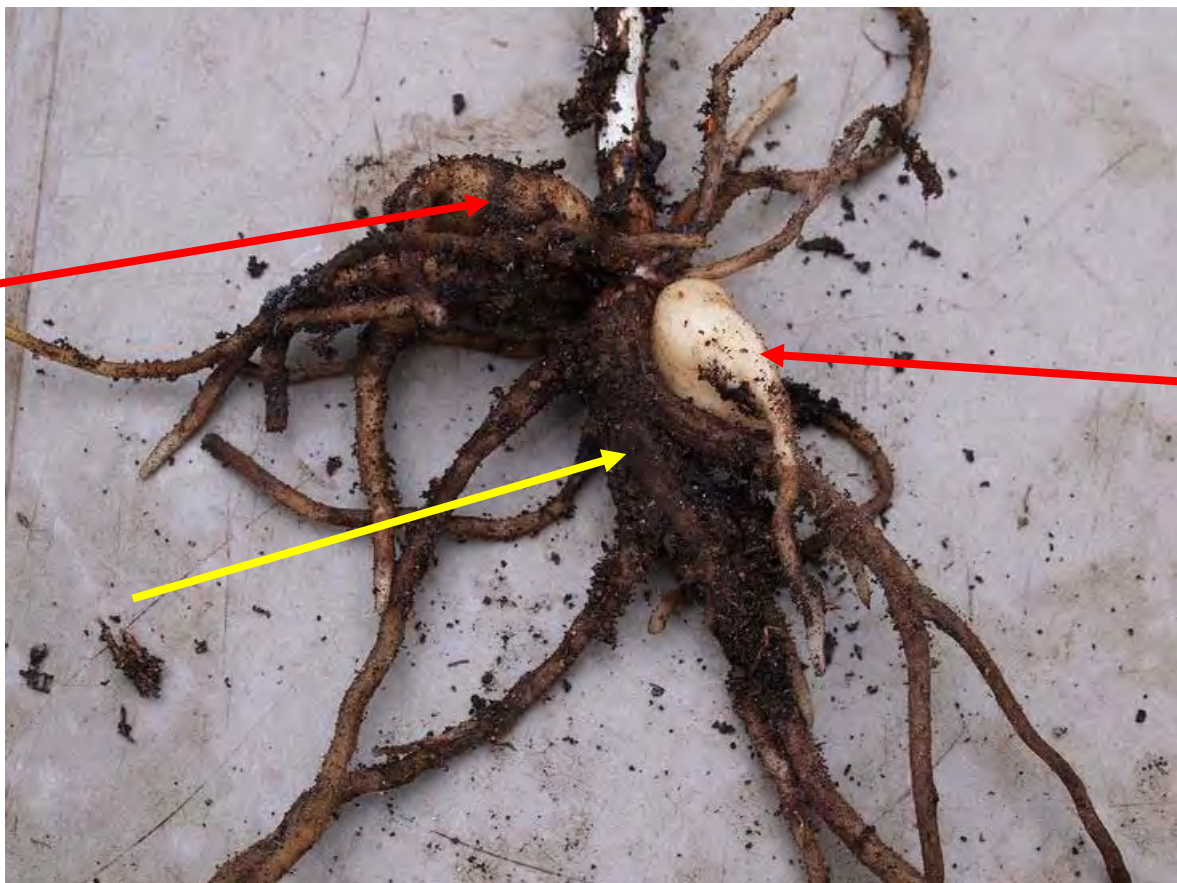
Clump of Dactylorhiza

It is at this stage of growth, just as the last of the flowers on the spike are turning brown, that I like to lift and split my clumps of *Dactylorhiza*.



Clump of Dactylorhiza

I lift the clump carefully with a fork taking care to insert the fork vertically so as not to damage the bulbs. Most garden forks have a slight curve to the spike which makes the natural movement through the soil in a forward direction so care is required. Firstly I carefully separate out the tangled clump into individual stems.



Dactylorhiza tuber

The stem rises from the old tuber, shown by a yellow arrow, and there should be two new tubers forming at either side of the stem base, with red arrows.



Dactylorhiza tuber

I carefully remove the new tubers with a rotating motion so as not to damage them or the current year's growth.



Re-planting Dactylorhiza tubers

I now replant some of the new tubers back into the hole they came out from and generally I can make three or four clumps from the one I lifted. I always refresh the ground with some well rotted garden compost or leaf mould.



Dactylorhiza stems

Now I replant the growing stems. These can either be planted directly into the garden or in this case I put them into a pot of humus rich compost and then they should be well watered. During the rest of the growing season these stems will go on to make more new tubers to replace the ones I have removed. Inevitably when clumps get so congested and tangled you will do some damage to the roots -this will do no lasting harm to the plants. It is also likely that you will break some stems off the tuber see below. With these I discard the stem but I still replant the old tuber as it will still make new tubers even without the stems - they will just be that bit smaller.





Rain Hats

I had an enquiry this week about little Perspex covers that I make for some of the alpine plants and while I am sure that I have written about them before I decided it was easier to write again than search back through the records. I have used them for close on thirty years and the good thing is they do not blow about in the wind.



Tools and materials

You will need some weld mesh and Perspex or similar clear plastic material. I salvaged all the materials - the Perspex was waste cuttings being dumped by a factory as was the weld mesh but you should be able to acquire similar materials near you. Never be afraid to go to a factory or workshop and ask for the waste I find a friendly smile and a chat and they are pleased to give me bits and pieces even if it is just to get rid of me. Small workshops are best as it is impossible to get past the security gates they have on most larger factories now. The main tool you need is a pair of wire cutters capable of cutting the gauge of weld mesh you have – I show a selection all capable of doing the job, plus a hammer and a bit of wood.



Take a bit of Perspex that will be the roof, it can be any size you want, and lay it on the weld mesh counting along four times.



When you get to the fourth edge add one square extra, you may need to add more if you are using a smaller grid size of mesh, then cut so you leave a row of individual wires sticking out from that end.





Next decide the height you want to make the sides add one grid and and cut along this section also leaving the individual wires protruding.



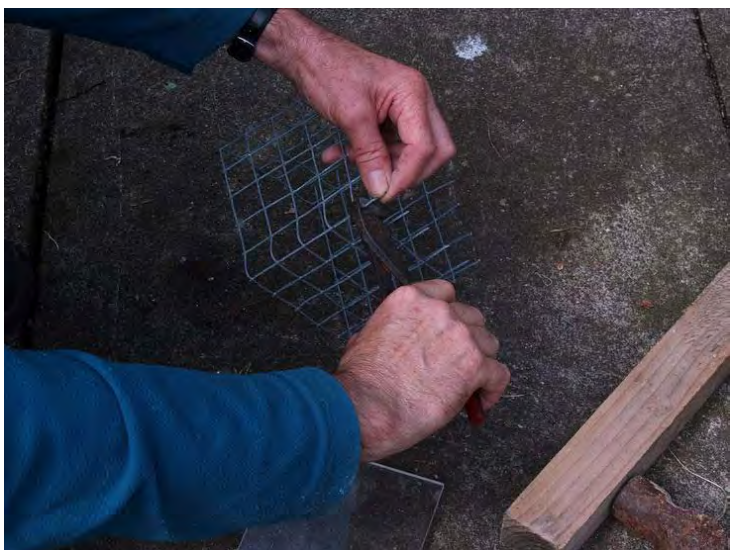
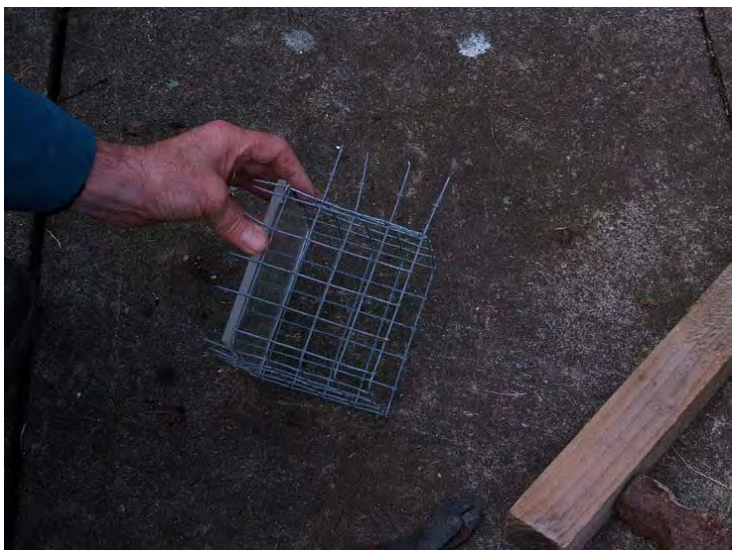
All should become clear now you can see the weld mesh frame for my cover. If you are making a number the same size you can use this as a template to mark out the others.



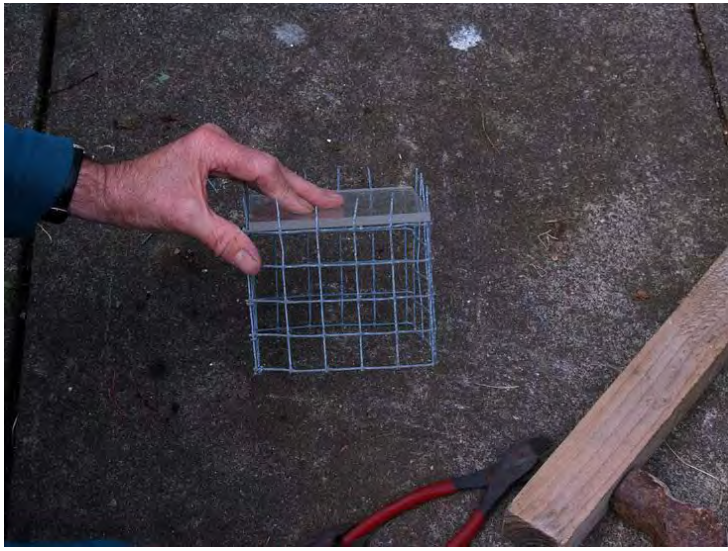
The next stage is to bend the mesh – use the Perspex to mark where you are going to bend the wire.



This time you want the sides to be a fraction smaller than the Perspex so that the corners of the Perspex over lap the corners of the mesh when you have finished. The bit of wood and the hammer can help here.



Having worked around, the four sides should now come together and the protruding wires should pass through the mesh of the leading edge where they can be bent over and trimmed back if necessary. I also remove any of the upward facing wires near the corners to allow the Perspex to sit on the top.



If you have got your measurements correct the Perspex should just fit on the top the protruding corners preventing it from falling down the inside while the remaining wires are bent over to secure it in place.



Selection of Rain Hats

It is easier than it sounds and you can make a number of hats in all different sizes ; some for scaled for specific plants. If you look carefully at the big one above I have used a thinner more flexible bit of plastic that I secured along two edges by drilling holes for the wire to pass through before bending them. This is an alternative method you can adopt if you have a drill.



Cage Hat

I have also made a number of plain weld mesh hats which are to protect cushion plants or seedlings from the unwelcome attention of Blackbirds or other hungry or inquisitive wild life.



Trough Hat

Finally I have also made a number of custom sized hats to provide winter or in our climate occasional summer protection for plants sensitive to excess moisture.