



BULB LOG 24.....16<sup>th</sup> June 2010



Troughs



Thank you for all the kind comments and support for the Bulb Log, whether on the forum by email or other methods: it reminds me that I should extend the log more often beyond bulbs to the wider range of plants we grow. So often the 'common and 'easy' alpines are neglected by the more experienced growers but that is to their cost. How good does the granite trough above look planted with **Sedum** and **Sempervivum**? I think it looks great and it keeps its good looks all year round : how many *Dionysias* do you think would do that?

**Erinus alpinus** is another easy alpine in that category and in this

trough I simply sowed the seeds over a lump of limestone marl where it looks after itself. Unfortunately this cement trough has suffered in the hard winter; it is both crumbling along the edge and it has been split in two across a diagonal. This was an experimental trough I made several years ago before I perfected the fully frost hardy cement based mixture that I now use. Luckily because the majority of the *Erinus* is rooted into the single lump of rock I will be able to transfer it over to a new trough without losing the effect – I will keep you updated.



**Arisaema ciliatum**



This lovely jungle of *Arisaema ciliatum* is a result of both self seeding and stolons which this plant sends out each year. The stolons tend to run in straight lines and flower from their first year while the seeded ones obviously start out as tiny seedlings and take three or more years before they achieve flowering size. The other difference in the seed raised ones is the subtle variation in the colour. I think that I have now enough of this plant in this bed so I will make a point of collecting the seeds this year.



Another fascinating observation is how some of the seedlings have survived growing under the dwarf Yew to reach flowering size. This is another possible reason for some plants developing a 'bulb' to support growth until the plant can climb through the undergrowth and reach the light ;think of some climbers like *Tropaeolum*.



**Arisaema nepenthoides seed head**

One of my favourite of this genus is *Arisaema nepenthoides* and I am delighted to see that I have got some fertile seed heads on a few plants again this year. I am not leaving these to self seed as I want to achieve maximum increase from this species and the best way to achieve this is to sow the seed into a pot.



**Arisaema nepenthoides seed germinating**

There are a number of advantages of a plant producing a large seed like *Arisaema* and one is that the larger store of food gives it a great start and the ability to support a larger seed leaf, like these newly germinating seedlings. The seed is so large it is almost like a small bulb in itself. Notice how the first seeds to germinate are around the edge of the pot -something I often observe.



## Front Drive

Now for an update on the front drive where the early bulbs are starting to go dormant and a number of *Fritillaria*, *Narcissus*, *Crocus*, *Erythronium* are producing good seed pods. I will help the distribution by scattering the seeds along this area when they are ripe.

For many a year the drive would be a sea of pink with *Geranium sanguineum* but the first of those at the sunniest end of the gravel are only just coming into flower now. The feature plant at the moment is a *Phyteuma* that, while attractive and filling a flowering gap, is doing rather too well. As I do not want it to dominate at the expense of the other plants I will pull the flowering stems off as soon as the flowers are over. This stops it seeding further and the plants do not seem to mind as they reappear every year.



### **Gravel area**

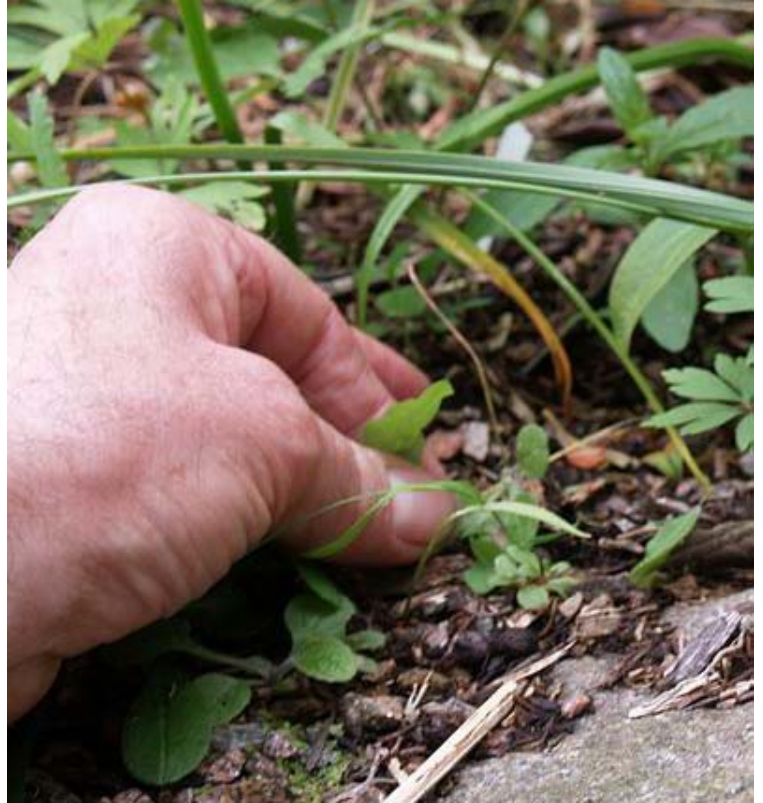
In the back garden there has been much self seeding into the gravel area. When we originally laid this area out with gravel, about twenty years ago, we said that we would keep it clear of plants – oh yes!! But with a pair of plantoholics like us that was never going to happen. Now it is full of plants many self seeded with others given a helping hand by us as we introduce and scatter seeds around. It is *Corydalis* 'Craigton Blue' that dominates this view at the moment.



### **Weeds**

I cannot speak about self seeding without mentioning weeds and this is a selection of the ones that we have.

They say a weed is just a plant in the wrong place and that is generally the case but some plants are more welcome than others. I love wild flowers that are so often called weeds – in fact it was those plants that first got me interested in plants when I was eleven years old. Some plants that I am delighted to see in the wild areas around where we live are not welcome in a restricted growing area like our suburban garden so they do need weeded out.



When you are pulling a weed out do not pull it straight up (above left) instead take a firm hold of it and pull it across the ground (right). This means that you pull the roots out in a staggered manner and you are more likely to get the weed out cleanly. Just think how you would remove a tree stump by first pushing it one way to break the roots one side then the other – it is just the same with small weeds.



**Self seeding plants**

All our weeding is done by hand and the rule is that you do not pull out a ‘weed’ until you can identify it. The reason for this should become obvious when you study the range of self seeding plants in this small patch of gravel.



**Gravel seedlings**

Which of these plants would you weed out?



**Meconopsis seedlings**

We stopped sowing many of the Meconopsis species into pots years ago as it is much easier just to let them scatter into the gravel and do it themselves, as you can see above. These are first year seedlings and generally what we do (if they have seeded in an area where they cannot stay until maturity) is to lift them just as they come into growth for the second year when they can be transplanted and they mostly settle without skipping a beat.



**Primula seedlings**

Many of the primulas we grow are also dealt with in this way as you can see in this small gravel section between the slabs in one of our paths. What I now have to do is to lift the primulas and replant them in a more suitable place and clean out the weeds at the same time. As long as I keep them well watered for a few weeks the primulas will be fine.



**Garden view**

In this view you can see some *Meconopsis betonicifolia*, which I understand we should now again be calling *Meconopsis baileyi*: these have seeded into some *Celmisia* plants. I have long had a fascination with the New Zealand flora and luckily many of those plants take to growing happily in North east Scotland. *Celmisias* are often derided by some as being just white daisies. I would say to them look again and you will see a group of stunning foliage plants that give the bonus of covering themselves in white flowers.





**Celmisia**

Yes, they are all white daisy flowers but they are different as this picture of two species growing side by side illustrates.



**Celmisia seedling**

I gave up collecting the seeds from our *Celmisias* years ago after having no germination at all but just occasionally we find a self sown seedling, like the one above, in the gravel areas. This tiny seedling is about 15mm in size.



**Celmisia seedling**

Close by to the one above we found another precious 'volunteer' seedling Celmisia, this time with broader, more silvery leaves.



**Self sown Rhododendron seedling**

After all the years that we have grown Rhododendrons, with many of them being raised from seed it was only last year that we found one self sown seedling in the gravel. I decided to leave it where it was for the time being and below you can see it as it is today.

The next two pictures are to show you one of the reasons why we so love Rhododendrons. Just like the Celmisias Rhododendron plants provide year round structure and interest with their often spectacular foliage. Not to mention that you can plant bulbs all around them☺



**Rhododendron**



**Rhododendron**



**Erythronium sibericum seed pod**

I found this *Erythronium sibericum* seed pod lying on the ground below the plant: a timely reminder that I should collect the rest of them so I can optimise the germination by sowing them into a pot. The seed capsule is one of the type that just disintegrates shedding the seed en masse. In the wild insects would be attracted to the white attachment and so help distribute the plant – in our garden that is my job.



**Erythronium sibericum seed**

As the capsule has fully formed it does not matter if you collect the seed when it is white or brown as the only difference is the brown seeds have started to dry and form a more resilient coat. I have already sown the seed into a just- moist compost and more or less treated them as tiny bulbs. I expect a near 100 percent germination next spring.



***Corydalis pseudobarbispela***

I did warn you that I was likely to show you the stunning *Corydalis pseudobarbispela* again and I have a good reason because I want you to notice the small holes that are appearing towards the back of each spur. To see the culprit more clearly see the last picture of this week's bulb log below. This bumble bee cannot fertilise the flower but that does not stop him breaking in and stealing the treat. I fertilised the flowers with a paint brush in the hope of getting some seeds. There is hope as you can see a tiny seed capsule in the picture above – I just hope it will not be the only one and that they will contain fertile seeds.

