



BULB LOG 10.....10th March 2010



Early Bulbs

What a wonderful time of year we are entering when we can see one of nature's wonders unfold before our very eyes.



All that is needed is the warmth of the sun to encourage this mix of Crocus to display their open flowers.



Trough

You do not need a garden bed to enjoy this spring display – here we have a batch of Spring bulbs, Crocus, Iris, Tulips and Narcissus to follow, all planted together in a trough. This is a trough that we bought with a number of others nearly thirty years ago when a local Nursery was having a big sale before they were taken over. Even though we were making our own troughs then we could not resist the absolute bargain price we managed to negotiate.



Gundestrup Cauldron

My favourite of that purchase is this one that we call the Gundestrup cauldron (800x470) because the images that decorate it seem to be after those on a large silver 1st Century (bronze age) cauldron that was found in a peat bog in Denmark in 1891. The original is round and made of solid silver with beautiful Celtic masks, figures and animals all the way around; ours is rectangular and made from 'reconstituted' stone - the original version can be seen in the National Museum of Denmark, Copenhagen. The planting has been taken over by two truly dwarf conifers, *Chamaecyparis obtusa* 'Minima' and 'Nana' which we bought from Potterton and Martin and planted when we got this trough all those years ago.



Although there is not much to see in this bed it will not be long before a host of flowers and foliage appears when you not see the ground at all.

The small blue highlights are the *Iris histrioides* bulbs that I split up a few weeks ago when they first appeared.



Now I can enjoy the flowers individually or in pairs instead of them being all congested and fighting for the space to unfurl their delicate looking blooms.



Iris reticulata

At the base of our kitchen extension wall there is a narrow south facing bed where I have been planting all sorts of bulbs. When I am repotting I sit just in front of this bed and whenever I find odd bulbs that have been missed or I have one too many to fit back into the pot I will turn round and poke it in to this bed so anything could appear. As it is the warmest driest bed we can offer I have planted a lot of Tulips in here hoping that they will settle and flower each year the first has just come into flower along with the various reticulate *Iris* cultivars.





Eranthis hyemalis

One of the other beds that is nearest the house and clearly visible from both our kitchen and sitting room is where we have concentrated on the early flowering plants like *Eranthis hyemalis*. There is nothing like looking out on a frosty morning and watching the warmth of the sun slowly wipe away the frost and encourage the *Eranthis* to open their flowers like a host of yellow solar panels.



Eranthis 'Guinea Gold'

Although it is perfectly hardy and grows well in our garden I still keep two fish box troughs full of *Eranthis* 'Guinea Gold'. Having them in troughs allows me to replot them every year into fresh compost rich in leafmould which encourages their natural habit of dividing at the tuber which increases my stock of this still quite rare and expensive hybrid between *Eranthis hyemalis* and *E. cilicica*.



Eranthis 'Grunling' and 'Schwefelglanz'

Two years ago come summer we were given small tubers of both Eranthis 'Grunling' and 'Schwefelglanz' and both forms are now flowering well in pot - this year I will plant them into the garden. I love the pale sulphur yellow flowers of 'Schwefelglanz' and I am very pleased to have some seed germinating that I collected from it last year – I am not so sure how I feel about about 'Grunling' with its green stripes.



Prop House plunge

If you check back two or three bulb logs ago you will be able to compare the progress and growth that has appeared in this relatively small plunge - this is probably the peak of its flower power



Feeding Potassium

EC Fertiliser (0-0-48)	
Sulphate of Potash	
Potassium Oxide (K ₂ O)	48.0% (39.8% K)
soluble in water	

In recent weeks I have been writing about the ongoing dilemma of when to water the bulbs in these changeable conditions that we have been having. Well the time has come and with the forecast predicting a settled period with sunny days I decided to water the bulbs. As I do not need to water the plastic pots so often as I did the clay pots I must also take this opportunity to give the bulbs their potassium supplement. I sprinkle a small amount of the white powder onto the surface of each pot – the quantity is not too critical as long as each pot gets a share.



Having spread the potash I then go around and give each pot a good soaking. using my home made watering nozzle allows me to avoid getting most of the leaves excessively wet which in turn helps limit any of the water transmitted fungal problems that can occur.



Most of the potash powder will dissolve and be washed into the compost but some of the bigger particles will stay on the gravel surface. This is not a problem as each time I water some more of the potash will be washed into the compost.

Gauging the amount of water I give to each pot is easy – I water until the pot floods to the top.

How quickly that water will be used up depends on how many bulbs are in the pot and how much growth there is. In a pot like this with one bulb this watering will last for a long time. Other pots that have lots of bulbs will both use the water up quicker through transpiration and have proportionally less volume of compost to hold the moisture because of the volume taken up by the bulbs. So pots that are crammed full of bulbs will need watering more often than those that have single or a small number of bulbs. It is best to let the compost almost dry out between watering then give them a complete soaking.



Crocus malyi

I have two pots of seedlings of *Crocus malyi* from different sources that have a purple feathered stripe running up the back of the outside three floral segments. I am not clear if these can be variations of the true species which Brian Mathew describes as pure white with a yellow throat or if they have hybridised with some other species. As the seeds I got were all from cultivation there would have been plenty of opportunity for cross-fertilisation. I would be interested to hear experiences from other Croconuts. Whatever they are, I think they are very attractive.



Crocus 'Carpathian Wonder'

I have a number of forms of *Crocus heuffelianus* that I have been raising from seed for years. All are distinguished by the dark 'w' marking at towards the ends of the petals. My seedlings all come from a dark form so have purple petals with a darker 'w' marking :none are so dramatic as Janis Ruksans' fantastic selection *Crocus 'Carpathian Wonder'* which I have just flowered for the first time – surely one of the most beautiful crocus cultivars.



Crocus x jessopae and Crocus pestalozzae

Crocus x jessopae a bit of a mystery plant because no one knows exactly where it came from – it is thought to be a hybrid. I think it is a very attractive delicate plant whose flowers and stature both remind me of *Crocus pestalozzae* – could this be one of the parents?



Hyacinthoides libanotica

The flower spike are just emerging on *Hyacinthoides libanotica* and it is at this time that the seeds of a species, if they were sown at the optimum time (August-October), should also be germinating. I have often shown that to save space I commonly sow seeds back into the pot with the parent bulbs and to the right of this pot you can see these seeds germinating.



Narcissus jacetanus

Whether you consider this to be different or a separate species from the similar *Narcissus asturiensis* is a matter of debate but I just love the smallest trumpet daffodils that are just coming into flower now.



Narcissus asturiensis vasconicus

How frustrating is it that the more one likes a plant, the harder it is to grow or propagate? *Narcissus asturiensis vasconicus* is my favourite form of this species with its widely flared trumpet on a very short stem but I have never managed to increase it from a single bulb and it has never set seed.



Narcissus asturiensis

On the other hand this potful increases steadily every year and it sets seeds most years. It is slightly taller at 10cms, with larger flowers, 2cms from front to back, than the *vasconicus* form but it is still a perfect miniature daffodil – and there I will leave you this week.