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

BULB LOG 35…….....…….1st September 2010

Autumn Storm

Yes, as all regular readers of the Bulb Log will know, I always water the bulbs on the 1st September. It is very important that you give them a really good soak, allowing the water to flood the pots more than once, to ensure that all the compost is soaked and not just down the edges of the pots where the water can flow most freely.

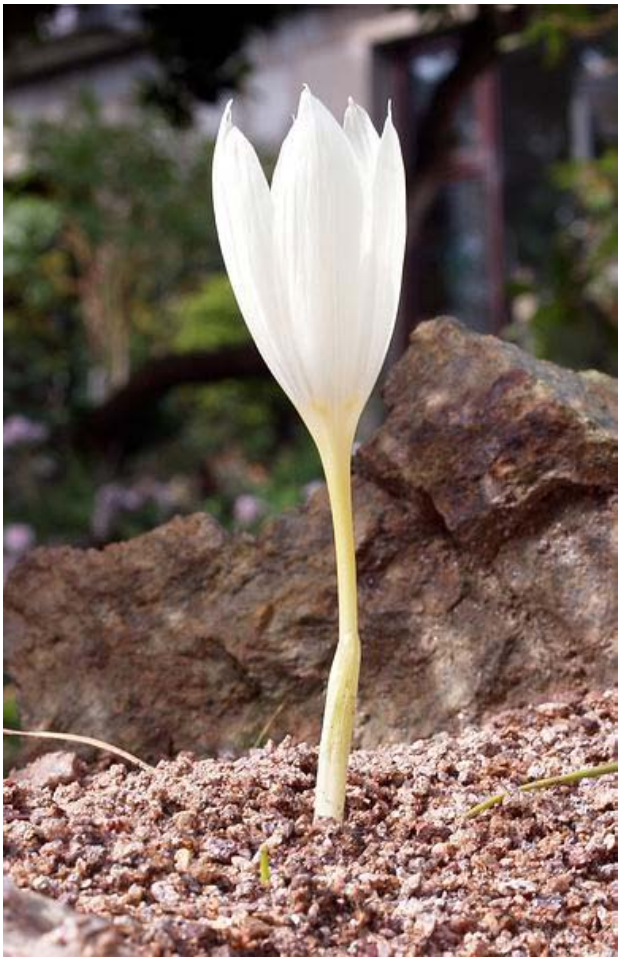
Once I have gone over all the pots I generally start again and give them another drenching- just to be sure. If like me you are using square plastic pots you also have to make sure that the sand plunge of bed is also well soaked. The plunge must be free draining because standing water is not desirable as the bulbs will remain too wet. The water in the picture of on the left drained after a few minutes which is ideal as I can be sure that the pots and sand are all fully soaked.

If you want more details of how I water the bulbs check back through the seven previous years of bulb logs for this date.

Cyclamen and Colchicum

All of a sudden the Colchicums are starting to appear - the first signs you see are the tiny shoots of colour pushing through the ground towards the light and before you know it one sunny day later they have extended and are opening their flowers. Exactly what triggers the autumn flowering bulbs into growth has always fascinated me and there are a number of possibilities that we can consider. Firstly the first water after the dry summer rest seems the most obvious but that cannot be the case because we grow many of the autumn bulbs in the open garden or in open frames where they have moisture available for most of the average Scottish summer. Also there are a number of these bulbs that will flower from a completely dry unplanted bulb.

The next most obvious trigger to consider is temperature. Is it the falling temperature? Well I cannot see that being the complete answer either as we regularly have cold spells throughout the summer while the bulbs often flower in nice sunny warm conditions in September. I have long had a suspicion that if temperature is involved then it is a temperature gradient that is the trigger :that is the differential between daytime and night time temperatures rather than an absolute low temperature.

Crocus vallicola

Just to illustrate the speed at which the bulbs can push their flower up can be seen in the next four pictures the two of the shoots were taken one afternoon while the pictures of the flowers were taken the following morning. It is obvious that the rush into flowering is stimulated by the warmth from the sunshine as the flowers make their display to attract the mass of pollinating insects that also seem to appear around this time.


Crocus nudiflorus

Crocus corms

During the last week I have had to rush to get all the bulbs prepared for the first watering either top dressing or in some cases repotting those that had just been top dressed for the last year or two. I re-emphasise that I believe for optimum results it is best to repot your bulbs every year but I am prevented from achieving this by the constraints of time and numbers. The multiple tunics and remains of the previous year's growth at the base of these corms show that it is a few years since these corms were exposed and cleaned up. In previous bulb logs I have shown how I normally remove the remains of the old corms and tunics when I repot but this picture shows that may not be necessary as these corms have grown well without being cleaned up. One factor that should be considered is that these corms of Crocus biflorus issauricus are a very easily grown species that is not susceptible to rotting off in our growing conditions unlike other species that I have to keep clean to avoid wet rots attacking the corms.

Fritillaria chitralensis

I am now making a start on preparing the fritillary house for the first watering which I will apply around the beginning of October. Most of the frits seem to start into growth about a month later than the Narcissus and Crocus so I now tend to water them on the 1st October. However this is a general rule and there are exceptions mostly in the Chinese and Eastern species which can start to root even before the previous stems have died back in late spring or early summer. These Fritillaria chitralensis bulbs show clearly the new roots are growing despite them being in bone dry compost – so what makes them start to grow?

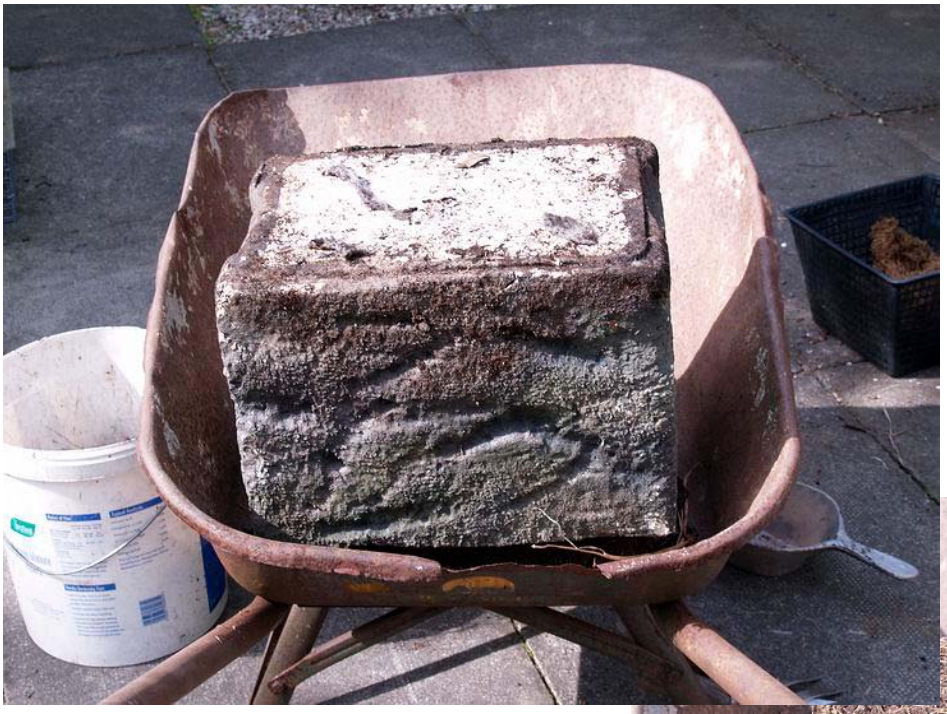
Fritillaria pudica bulbs

I think I mentioned that as part of my attempt to reduce the number of pots of bulbs we grow I am going to try and grow many more in the garden. To this end I am planting a few Fritillaria pudica bulbs into the area I opened up below the pine tree on the raised peat wall.

I will be planting a number of bulbs into this area to see what will grow in these conditions and I am planting the Fritillaria pudica bulbs out towards the edge of the pine canopy – the drip zone. My inspiration for this planting can be seen in the picture below.

Fritillaria pudica

I photographed these Fritillaria pudica flowering in exactly that situation – at the edge of the drip zone of a large pine tree growing in the Colombia River Gorge in Oregon.



Erythronium box

I am also taking advantage of the fine weather to replant some of the Erythroniums that I did not do last year. I repotted all the plunge baskets and pots in the frames last year so now I am concentrating on the deep fishbox troughs.

I turn the box upside down in a wheelbarrow and then remove the box which makes it easy for me to excavate from the bottom to find the bulbs. Approaching them from below is much less likely to cause them any damage.
I recycle the compost by refreshing it with a dusting of bone meal and adding a good layer of leafmould to surround the replanted bulbs.

Erythronium tuolumnense bulbs

Erythronium tuolumnense makes the biggest bulbs of the entire genus – many are 15cms or more long. Another good feature of this species is that it makes plenty of offset bulbs which while not as large as the parent bulbs many bare still of a flowering size. Above are the parent bulbs which I have replanted and below are the offsets.

Erythronium tuolumnense offset bulbs

Roscoea tibetica

While checking the frames I discovered that the seed pods on this Roscoea tibetica have opened - luckily they have spilled the seeds into the pot and I should be able to collect most of them. This is another of the plants that I am going to plant out into a raised bed and troughs rather than growing it in a pot. It will not cut down the overall number of pots that I have to maintain as I will sow the seeds into a pot – and therein lies my problem of trying to cut down.

Cyclamen mirabile

I will leave you this week with the first flowers appearing on Cyclamen mirabile - my favourite of that genus.