



BULB LOG 12.....23rd March 2011



Spring seems to have arrived as I write on Monday 21st March: we are basking in lovely warm sunshine which pushes the temperature up to 17C encouraging a most magnificent display of colour. This mass planting of mixed



bulbs is exactly what I am trying to achieve all over the garden and on top of that I want this effect to be ever changing so another group of bulbs will take over as the ones in these pictures start to fade and go dormant - this is what I call my 'High Rise and Time Share' gardening.

Corydalis are wonderful subjects for this style of planting because they come into flower very early, have a wonderful range of colours and

by mid-May they will die back underground for the rest of the year.



Corydalis solida

Corydalis solida has a wide range of colours from deep red to white including purple and almost blue. The one on the left is the one nearest to a true blue that I have raised. Not all the seedlings are good colours; occasionally some can be a bit 'muddy' but these are easy to remove to keep the cleaner colours. If you want a true blue that flowers this early then look no further than Corydalis ornata below.



Corydalis ornata



Corydalis ornata

This species is less common in cultivation and certainly more expensive than *Corydalis solida* is but do not let that put you off, it is a great plant for the garden.

Also try to resist falling into the trap of planting it in a pot and keeping it in an alpine house as it is much happier in the garden. It seems that the more expensive and rare a plant is the more we are inclined to grow it in a pot – to look after it better! Then, worried about losing it, we usually starve it of sufficient water and nutrients just when it wants to grow resulting in the bulb getting smaller each year. I find that so often the best thing we can do with these expensive plants is to stick them in the garden where they can look after themselves much better than we can. This is certainly the case with *Corydalis ornata*.



Corydalis 'Craigton Red' and *C. malkensis*

The only selection of *Corydalis solida* that I have named is *Corydalis* 'Craigton Red' seen above which is the most red of any form that I have seen. It is post box red when it first comes out and here it is set off beside the creamy white *Corydalis malkensis*. White is very important when making mixed plantings to neutralise colours that, in some people's eyes, might otherwise clash. White forms of *Corydalis solida* are not that common so it is a good alternative to use *C. malkensis* which seeds around freely.



Corydalis malkensis

Corydalis malkensis does not increase vegetatively and form clumps like *C. solida* but it does set seed. You can either collect and sow the seed into pots as soon as it is ripe or you can scatter it to form colonies around the garden. I always allow some to fall from the plants and naturalise while scattering a handful around some of the other beds where I would like it to grow. Some people call it a weed!!! This will never be a weed in my eyes it is too beautiful and it would be so easy to get rid of it if you wanted to. Occasionally I find flowers with a pink flush like the spike above left and I am not sure if this is a natural variation or if these are hybrids. I have never noticed any of these colour forms clumping up.



Corydalis solida

After about three to five years a single *Corydalis solida* bulb will produce a clump like this and then it is best to divide it. If you leave clumps too long without lifting and dividing them they will start to produce fewer flowers and then weaker growth. Ideally I like to divide them every three years. I do this just as the leaves go yellow and collapse, in May. Depending on how many bulbs there are I will replant 1/2 to 1/3 back in the original spot mixing in a generous portion of leafmould and the others can be used to spread my

early carpet of colour to other areas of the garden.



Digital photography is not just a great tool for taking pictures it is also very useful for keeping notes of what the various beds look like at different seasons. In the bed above you will see that there is an intense display of Corydalis to the left of the picture but the bed in front of the large Rhododendron is quite bare just now. There are lots of bulbs just starting to push through in this bare area that will flower in a few weeks or a month's time but I will use this picture to guide me where to plant the spares when I divide the Corydalis or scatter the seeds to ensure that this area also has colour for as long a season as possible.



Colchicum bed

This picture of a bed with a lot of Colchicums is for the same purpose to show me the gaps at this time of the season so that I can pop in early flowering subjects that will flower now and not mind being overgrown by the Colchicum leaves when they expand.



Spring display

Here in another Spring bed is the sort of thing I am trying to achieve with time share planting. Many of the bulbs that you see will have completed their above ground growth cycle by May and then I want another sequence of bulbs or other plants to provide colour or interest so that we do not have to look at bare ground for nine or ten months of the year.

Galanthus and Corydalis flower at the same time as the Hellebores and Hepaticas, soon Fritillaria and Erythronium will be the stars of this bed followed on by Dactylorhiza in June and so my sequence will go on.

I have discussed my 'Time Share' methods before and will follow up on it during this year as I hope to do quite a lot of splitting and spreading this year time permitting.

The picture below shows a view of the garden across the troughs and raised bed area and lets you see that we also value the structure plants. Trees and shrubs create the shape and form of the garden leaving the ground level free for our time share plantings.





Bulb bed

Another view looking towards the bulb bed that I raised up a few years ago by turning the stone edging from lying flat to standing on its edge. This bed has become a great area for me to experiment further with my combinations of plants in an attempt to have flowering interest for as many days of a year as I can and again I have taken a number of photographs of it just now to show me where there are seasonal gaps and where there are spaces to squeeze in a few more plants that will grow in harmony and flower at a different time. The stone edging does not go all the way to the path edge so I am creating a mini crevice type arrangement that I will plant up with suitable plants.





Hepatica nobilis

The first plants that I planted out were a pot of seedlings of a small white *Hepatica nobilis* that comes true from seed and reflects a similar more established planting of this plant on the other side of the path. Having similar plants or colours at various points helps to lead your eye around the garden just as an artist uses similar devices to guide a viewer's eye around a painting or work of art. I see our garden as a living work of art where I try and blend nature into my own vision.



Hepatica

A lovely deep blue *Hepatica* enjoys the dappled light that it receives before the leaves come on the trees above it.



Crocus vernus albiflorus

This is a garden seedling that took my eye many years ago and remains one of my favourite crocus for the garden. It has an elegant shape with the colour of the violet tube just extending up the pure white floral segments.



Crocus vernus albiflorus

Looking down into the flowers there are lovely violet flashes that enhance the elegant shape perfectly.

This clump has now reached its optimum size and I hope to split it this summer.

Leaving it longer will see the flowers getting too congested to see them as individuals in a group and also the flowering capacity will be greatly reduced by the increasing competition.



Crocus veluchensis

It is my aim to get a lot more bulbs out of pots and into the garden and this pot of *Crocus veluchensis* is among those. It is a fabulous colour and a great garden plant that I have often admired planted along with the hot coloured *Corydalis* in the long bed next to the Bulb frames at Gothenburg Botanic Gardens.



Leucojum vernum carpaticum

The yellow tipped *Leucojum vernum carpaticum* also makes nice clumps – this small group was planted as a single bulb just three years ago.



Leucojum vernum carpathicum

Another variation of *Leucojum vernum carpathicum* similar to the one above but this time the ovaries are also always yellow. Look carefully and you will see that the degree of yellow on the tips can vary some are more yellow and some are close to green. You can even find flowers that have green tips on one side and yellow tips on the other. Obviously the growing conditions, especially light levels and temperatures have an effect on the colour of the tips.



Narcissus cyclamineus



Narcissus cyclamineus seedlings

Narcissus cyclamineus is another perfectly hardy bulb that I grow in the garden and also in frames where I regularly raise them from seed which produces an interesting range of corona shapes.



This narrow hot south facing bed has become a good place to try Tulips and other bulbs that need all the heat that we can give them this far north to ripen the flower buds. *Tulipa polychroma* and *Tulipa turkestanica* are seen here.



Tulipa biflorus



Erythronium dens canis

The first clumps of *Erythronium dens canis* are opening their flowers, as you can see. This is the darkest colour form we have and below is a paler form.



Erythronium dens canis



I will leave you with another picture of what spring can look like in Aberdeen - if only it would come and stay when it arrives without the threat of winter returning again next week.