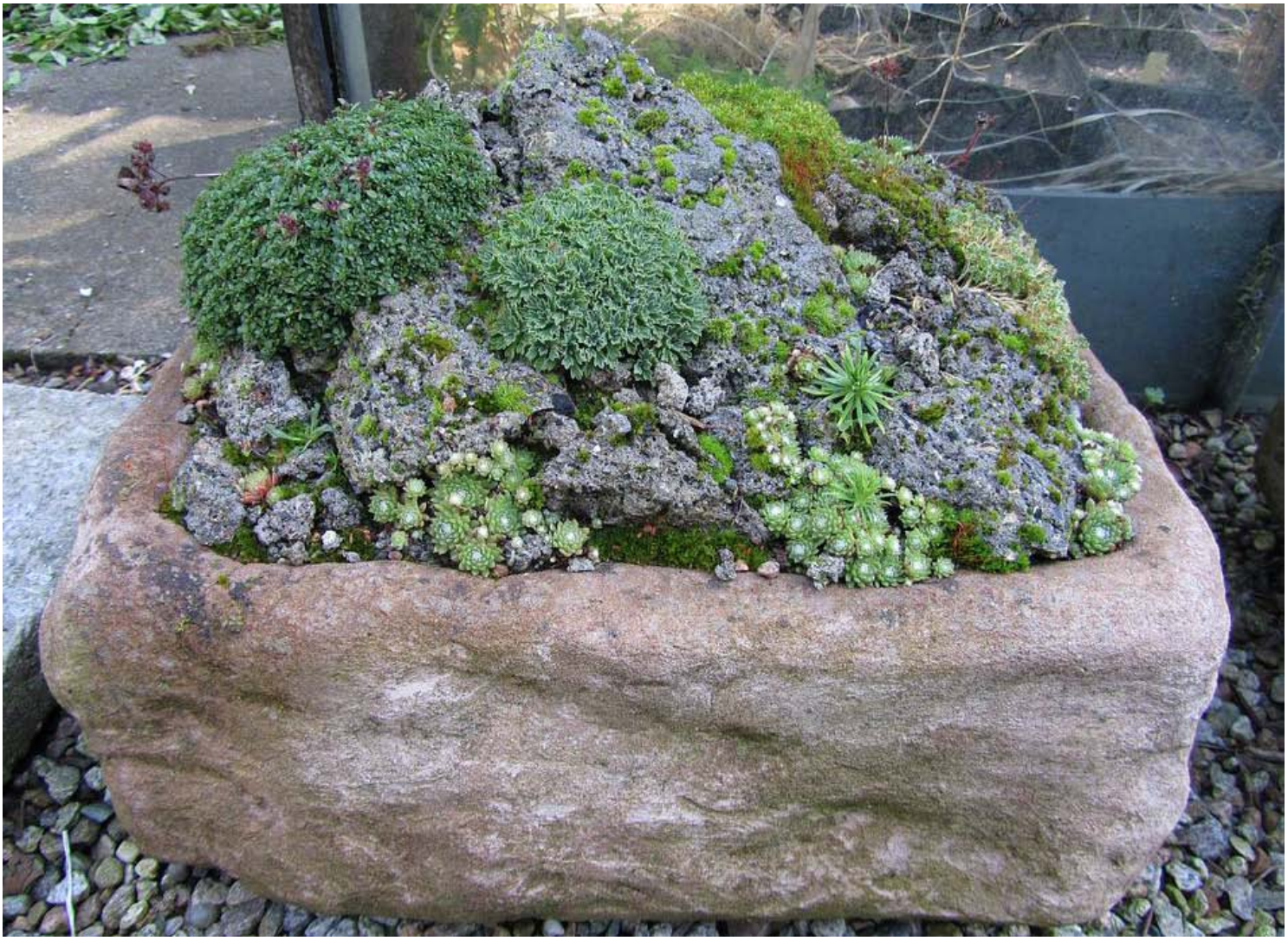
SRGC ----- Bulb Log Diary -----

BULB LOG 34.....22nd August 2012

On Saturday the SRGC held its first Summer Display where over sixty people attended each of the four 30 minute talks and over one hundred people visited the display making it a great success to build on in the future.
I took three of my smallest troughs down and it is amazing just how much interest these generate both within the Membership and from the general public.

It is four years since I made these using left over sand cement mortar mix at the end of a trough making workshop. First I made a flat base, taking care to also make a drainage hole, then built up a simple side and that is it. At another workshop I demonstrated planting using different materials and these wee troughs were the ideal subject.

The two above use natural stone; volcanic stones in the left hand version, lime stone on the right and roofing slates in the picture alongside. The common feature and the main message I wanted to get over in the workshop is to create height. Making your trough look interesting before you put any plants in will ensure a pleasing result. To give the idea of how these could look with plants I had taken a bag of bits of plants literally pulled from plants such as Thyme, Saxifraga, Sempervivium, Erigeron, etc and stuck bits around each of the three troughs. Every bit rooted and has grown on giving the wee troughs a very established and pleasing look with minimum care.



I will carry on with the trough theme and review the state of some of my more recent experiments using broken concrete blocks for landscaping the troughs. As you will see the plants are all doing well and any fears that some expressed that the lime and salts in the cement could harm the plants have been vanquished in these cases. I used old recycled concrete blocks but if you were using newly made ones it might be wise to break them up and allow the pieces to weather for a week or two before using them – this would allow rain and natural weathering to leach out any potentially harmful salts.

Seedling Androsaces are germinating and mosses starting to colonise the surface of the blocks which may need controlling in the future. I have a few troughs that are becoming so well established that the plant growth has all but hidden the underlying rock work and I have to make the decision do I allow this or do I trim back some of the growth so that some of the rock work is always exposed.

Another version also planted up last year.

This one with the lovely Saxifraga brunonis is landscaped using natural limestone marl and I am sure you will agree that it is hard to tell the difference between the natural material and the recycled concrete. I am very keen that as gardeners we find imaginative and creative ways of using recycled materials which in turn would help to remove the pressure on natural environments such as limestone pavements.

One more trough update for this week is the slate trough that I planted with Androsace cuttings almost exactly two years ago.
Most have grown on well, especially enjoying the cool wet summer we have had, sending out their runners to explore for new suitable planting areas. These plants that produce runners are true nomads always seeking new territory, reluctant to stay where we originally planted them.

Another plant enjoying the continually cool wet conditions is Cyananthus lobatus, cascading over the end of one of the slab beds.

We should always look on the bright side of life and instead of bemoaning the plants that have suffered from the lack of sunshine we should enjoy those that have done so well - just look at the size of this Primula florindae.

Roscoea auriculata flowers that bit later than other species in our garden and I, along with many others, have been guilty of calling it Roscoea purpurea in the past. This is a fascinating genus with many beauties for our garden and if you are at all interested in them then you should get Jill Cowley's superb monograph published by Kew. Check out a review I wrote when it was first published - The Genus Roscoea.

A tall Thalictrum species we raised from seed collected in the Himalaya by Alastair Mckelvie flops over - here scrambling through this bed fooling people into thinking we have a lovely dwarf low growing plant while else where it climbs up through Rhododendrons to display its clusters of delicate starry flowers above the shrubs leaves.

The single spike of Dactylorhiza o'kelleyi that I first showed a few weeks ago is now in full flower and I decided it was time to help nature along and stimulate extra tubers to grow.

Regular readers will be familiar with this method of carefully lifting the plants as the flower spikes reach maturity to reveal the tubers.

Some plants naturally produce two or more tubers at the base of each stem but typically the most sought after and scarce plants produce but a singleton to replace themselves without increase – perhaps this is why they are scarce.

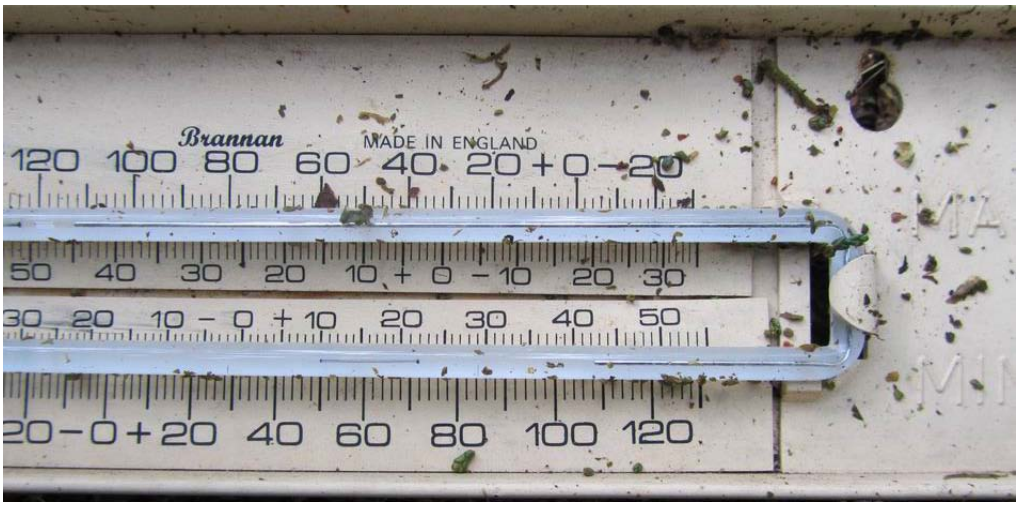
Lifted plant showing old and single new tuber.

The method is simple: carefully holding the new tuber twist it round until it snaps away leaving the old tuber still attached to the stem. Both parts are replanted - the new tuber should be big enough to grow and flower next year while more new tubers will now grow from buds at the base of the stem. Depending on how many appear these may take another year of growth before they reach flowering size and sometimes a several small tubers are formed.

The first Cyclamen hederifolium heralds that summer is nearing an end and I always associate this with certain routine garden tasks such as hedge cutting.

Not being the neat and tidy type that likes crisp sharp-edged hedges I only cut ours once a year and see it as a crop. The trimmings are all shredded and composted so that all the goodness taken from the ground to fuel the growth can be returned later in the season.

The green trimmings are greatly reduced in volume once they have been through the shredder and because they are shredded they start to compost immediately so even after one day on the compost heap they have started to heat up and turn brown.



I placed a thermometer in the heap and only twelve hours after shredding the temperature was already up to 43C as the material composts.

By January the heap will have reduced to around half of its original volume and will be ready to spread as a mulch before the flush of spring bulbs appear.

Many people take advantage of their local Council's garden waste collection to dispose of all this material but I am sure that they do not realise that they are also putting away the very goodness from the soil. Most of the nutrients and trace elements used to fuel the growth of the plant will be returned as the composted matter feeds the micro organisms of the soil that recycle these elements and compounds into soluble salts that can in turn be absorbed by plants to feed future growth - this is nature's cycle.

While shredding I also clear up some of the old growth such as spent flowering stems from around the garden and that is when I make discoveries revealing the under-growth. Above: a cluster of Arisaema seedlings has appeared where the bright red berries that formed the seed head fell – nothing in our garden is attracted to distribute these around.

The beautiful Rhododendron pumilum produces a few flowers, the second flowering of the season. It is a real favourite of mine despite the fact that it does not grow that well and the only tiny plant that I have left of it is this single seedling growing at the base of a raised bed, being swamped by moss.

The well chewed leaves do not distract me from the beautiful Eucomis schijffii, perhaps the slugs even help pollinate this low growing species.

Finally this week the flowers of Colchicum alpinum are a timely reminder that it is nearing the time to water the bulb houses for the first time of this new season.....