



BULB LOG 48..... 28th November 2012



Removed Crocus flowers



The most important task in the bulb house just now is removing the Crocus flowers as they go over. It is amazing just how quickly they become a host for moulds especially when the air is full of moisture as it is here.



Another task is making sure that the bulbs in leaf have sufficient moisture to both sustain them and fuel any growth however with the cool to cold conditions there is little growth and any water lost through transpiration is more than compensated for by our moisture laden air.



I have been looking back over the last ten years of the Bulb Log and in all that time I have always had Narcissus in flower to show you by the beginning of November if not the end of October – not this year. These are the most advanced flower buds that I have on the Narcissus and with the low light and cold conditions it does not look like they will be opening any time soon. I believe that if the conditions remain mild after watering them in September many forms of the *Narcissus romieuxii* will go on and flower, however if it is cold they will grow very slowly

not flowering until much later in their season. I remember a time, before I started writing the Bulb Log, that I never had a Narcissus in flower until well into January at least - that was when we had colder autumns and an earlier onset of winter. Recent years have had less well-defined seasons with the summer merging into the autumn then a cool rather than cold start to winter so some bulbs started to flower much earlier than they used to. This year however we had a cool summer, even by our standards, running into a cool autumn with no significant temperature changes to act as triggers so the bulbs have been slower to come into flower. Add into the equation the now shorter hours of day light as the sun dips low in the sky and I suspect I will not see any Narcissus flowering until after the turn of the year. With the sun being so low, even at its zenith, it hardly hits the bulb houses at all so it does not have the same warming effect to encourage the flower buds to emerge that it would have provided even four weeks ago.

Ornithogalum leaves

I can see from the dark colour of the gravel on these pots that there is still plenty of moisture available even though I have not watered them for some weeks.

Broad surfaces, like these Ornithogalum leaves, will lose moisture quicker than the narrow ones of the Narcissus but again the moisture laden cold air, the lack of direct sunlight and no exposure to wind means that water loss will be low. I will check daily as things can change quickly but I suspect I will not need to water for some time yet.



At least I have plenty of interesting emerging leaves to look at and share with you even if I have few flowers likely to open over the next few weeks

Last week I illustrated some chewed flowers and leaves in the bulb house and said I would sort that out. Well this week I can show that by a very sparing use of the blue slug pellets I have at least stopped some slugs from eating any more of my precious plants.





Garden view



While there are a few Crocus flowers still holding up in the garden it is the structural plants that come even more into play at this time of year.

The trees of course play their part and shrubs of all sizes from the larger Rhododendrons down to the smaller Cassiope provide shape and form amongst the litter of leaves that wait to be cleared away if and when our weather is amenable.

Here the yellowing stems of Alliums mimic the evergreen foliage of *Cassiope fastigiata* x *wardii*.



Acer 'Osakazuki' bark



As well as all the other benefits they bring to our gardens the bark of trees can also provide wonderful colour and texture during the winter.



Acer griseum

The cinnamon coloured peeling paper nature of *Acer griseum* bark is one of the most attractive of that genus. It is a relatively small tree that requires little pruning to keep it in scale for even the smallest of gardens.



Most of us are familiar with the beautiful white bark of *Betula utilis* 'Jacquemontii' but this species has barks of varying shades including the cinnamon one, above right, that can compete with *Acer griseum*.



Betula utilis



The shedding paper type bark on trees is very attractive to us but it serves an important role in nature. It is most often found in trees that grow in moist areas where mosses and lichens can also thrive. Many of these mosses and lichens grow on the trees and so by exfoliating the topmost layers of bark each year the tree also shed the growth of mosses and lichens that could suffocate it.

Cardiocrinum giganteum

The poor seed set that we have experienced this year extends to the Cardiocrinum on the left.

Most years every seed pod on these magnificent lilies will be fully fertile producing masses of seed but due to the poor weather at flowering time this year very few are plumped up with good seed.



The sun at mid-day does not rise high enough to clear the trees at the bottom of the garden and we are still three weeks away from the shortest day of the year.



When the leaves are off the trees the trough area feels much more open and connected to the rest of the garden. In spring the emerging leaves form 'walls' turning the garden into a series of distinct compartments.



In the foreground of the view above you will see, in the nearest raised bed, the most recent landscape I created using broken concrete blocks. During freezing conditions a layer of ice forms on the surface of the broken blocks just like it does on the lumps of natural tufa that we have.

I have been using broken concrete blocks for long enough now to be able to recommend using this material to landscape your troughs, raised beds or gardens. I would love to have a spot to create a large crevice style rock garden using this recycled material.



Final picture this week celebrates again that there is beauty in nature even as it decays.....