



BULB LOG 23.....4th June 2014



The opening image is of the view we get from our swing seat where I often have breakfast and ponder the world. I am always casting a critical eye, analysing and considering how we can improve or fine tune this illusion that we call our garden. It struck me how important light is to the overall effect – an obvious statement as without light we see nothing – my thoughts were tuned to how the intensity and direction of the light was constantly changing the image in front of me aided by the light breeze moving the foliage around. The effect of strong low sun creating deep shadow as well as picking out highlights made a very dramatic scene that is very difficult to capture photographically. The first picture above shows the bright light beyond the main subject area creating a bright

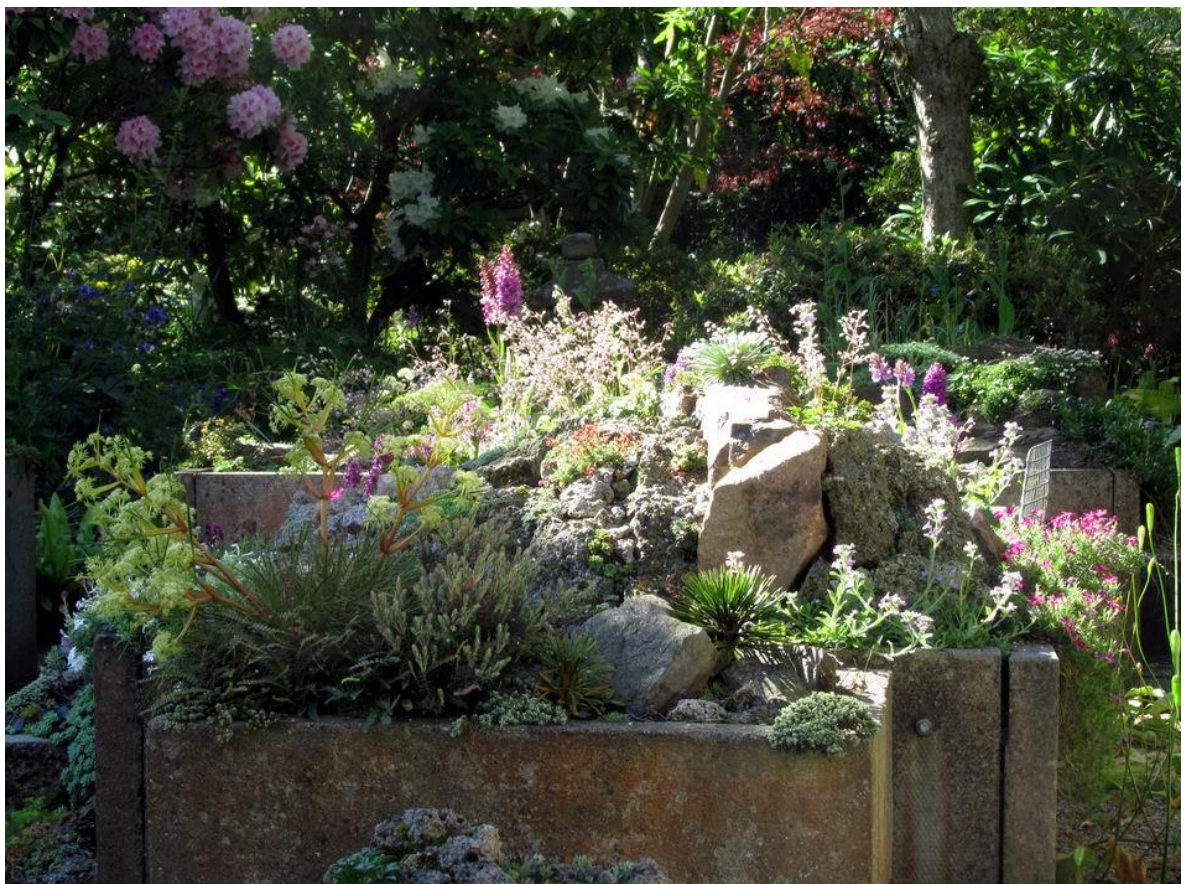


sunny back drop and I had to carefully manipulate the exposure to get as near as a camera can, the image I was seeing. The human eye connected to our brain gives us a very advanced image gathering system that is constantly sampling and adjusting all the variations, or contrast, of light and shade. To get an idea how a camera will see that image try using the age old trick employed by

artists to gauge the different tonal areas before them. Starting with your eyes open gradually close your eyelids until you are looking through a tiny slit – now you are seeing approximately the same limited tonal range that a camera can handle –

basically the tones merge into very light or very dark with little graduation - slowly open your eyes again and see the range of tones increase.

Most gardeners know that a garden changes through time as plants grow, through the seasons and the years, but they also change by the second as the light passes through windblown foliage, as clouds pass and as the sun moves through the sky.





I prefer to take photographs in the garden when there are high white clouds giving a flat light, as in the picture above, this keeps the contrast between deep shade and the strongest highlights at a low level that cameras can cope with more easily.



Compare the picture above with this 'contrasty' one taken in strong sunshine – look at them both using the eye lid trick or walk back from your screen and see how the first image still looks much the same from any distance but the 'contrasty' one starts to merge into two zones one dark one light. Only the mid tones are correctly exposed in this intense light, the highlights are burned out while the shadows are

too dark. Having said that I prefer flat light I will qualify that statement in that for illustrative purposes images in flat light will display, project or print much better while strong light and sharp contrasts offer much more creative potential.



Careful manipulation of the image can help – here I have set my compact camera exposure for the highlight area in the middle distance using the flash to illuminate the *Aciphylla* in the foreground.



Once again the lighting gives the image some drama with the backlit *Corydalis* in the foreground standing out against the darker background.



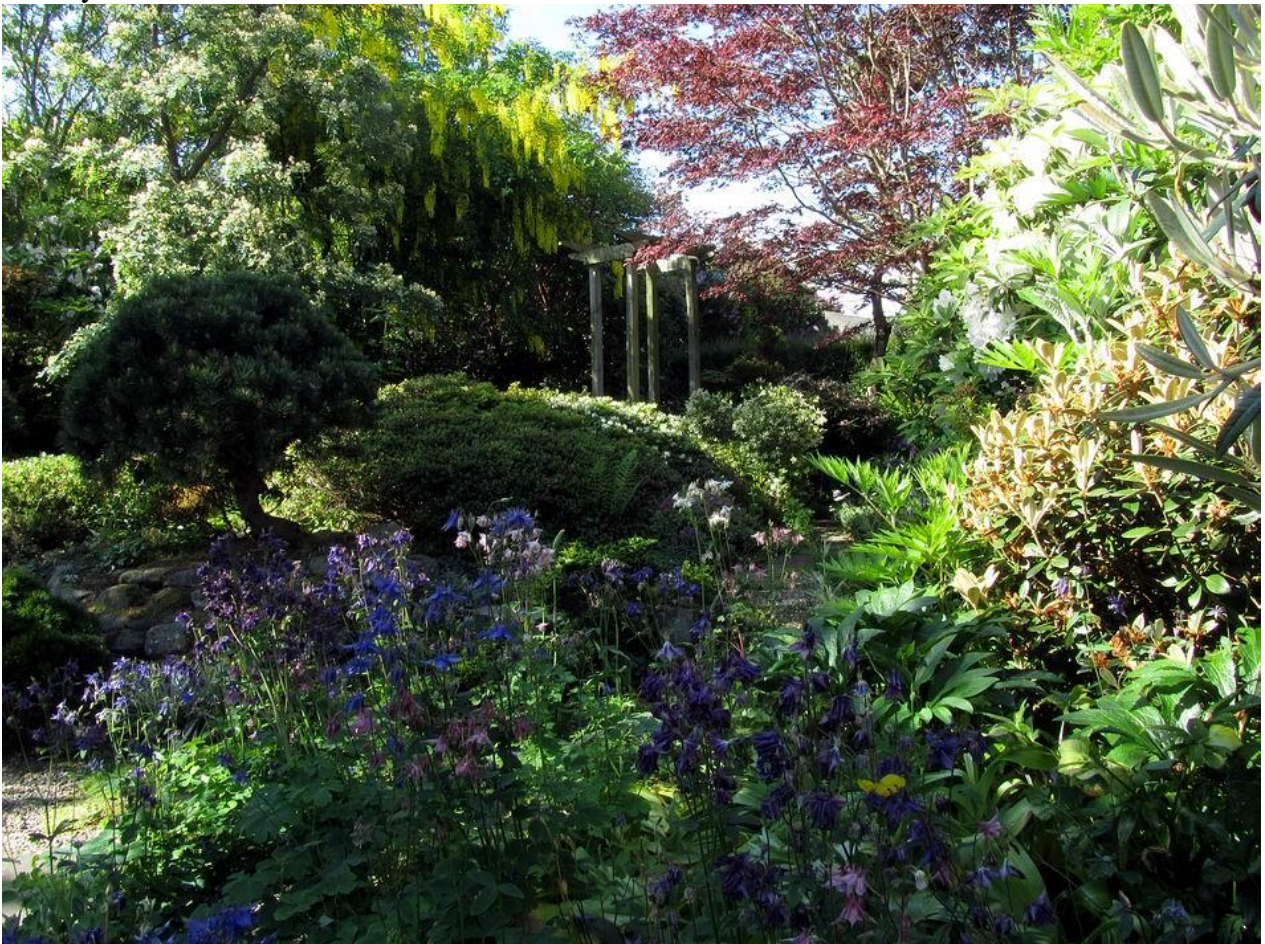
Lighting makes the picture – I watched this backlit scene, from the swing seat, become much less interesting, flatten, as the sun went behind a small cloud then come alive again when the cloud passed and the light shone through the leaves once more.



Most times you would walk past this peony leaf without being drawn to it but when it is backlit against a darker background it shouts out, “look at me, see my shape and colour”.



Here again it is the lighting coming through that highlights the shape and form of the same tree peony stems. This also leads me to emphasise the importance of using height in a garden - trees and shrubs allow you to split spaces into different areas, trees above your head also filter and break up the light, being able to look through foliage to a bright scene beyond adds drama and interest.



While strong sun light can be more difficult to deal with photographically it will give the impression of greater depth to a scene; non directional light that you get in white cloud days is more within in the camera's capabilities but flattens out the perspective – hence the term 'flat light'.



All photographs are a compromise - not what we see with our continually sampling well developed eyes and brain. The green and red leaves are well exposed as is the lovely blue sky but the shadows have become dark masses with little detail and the wonderful white flowers of *Rhododendron decorum* have been burned out to white masses.



To capture the detail of the beautifully scented flowers you need to move round and capture them in the shade.

So we can see the garden changes by the second as light varies as well as by the season and in the longer term by growth and aging. It is this process that attracts me to gardening which to me is a journey and not a destination. Unlike other forms of art when I can decide when a work is finished I do not have control on when a garden is finished – this trough which is a single lump of limestone planted with *Erinus alpinus* is its second incarnation. The first one was planted many years ago in a trough I made using one of the many ‘hypertufa’ mixes before I discovered that these mixes simply did not survive the continual frost heave that we get every winter. When the hypertufa trough broke apart the rock dried out and the well-established *Erinus* died so I had to start again. The process I use is slow - I simply scatter seeds on the rock and enjoy the process of growth the only way I intervene is to add more seeds to get as wide a colour range into the small scene as I can.



We have reached a crossroads in the journey of our front garden where drastic actions are required. Planted up in 1985 these Rhododendrons were described as slow growing ‘dwarf’ forms and the sizes quoted are generally what the plants would achieve in 10 years but now after nearly 30 years their growth has exceeded the space we have - there used to be a path way in the middle of this picture and now it is over grown. Last year we opened up one half of the garden and now we have tackled this side – we enjoyed the flowers then as soon as they dropped we chopped them down to almost ground level. We dug some roots out and have left others that we hope will regrow again from the old wood giving us another potential 30 years of growth!



As is our policy nothing is wasted if we can reuse it.



Everything that our shredder can cope with was reduced to a number of piles of chippings which will be spread as mulch after a short composting period - the larger branches will be recycled for the wood. We have not flattened the garden completely there are still plenty of trees and shrubs retained but the centre has been opened up giving us a great opportunity to underplant the area with bulbous and herbaceous plants.



This *Rhododendron yakushimanum* is one of the ones that we have not cut back, in my experience they do not break buds from old wood, but as *Rhododendrons* move easily at almost any time, providing you water them well, we will relocate it.

Our garden journey has many paths that all merge. We are now entering the best season to lift and divide bulbs - the yellowing leaves indicates that growth is over and the bulb is retreating for its summer rest - they also act as a guide to finding the bulbs. This clump of *Iris reticulata* has increased well but has become congested meaning the individual flowers cannot be appreciated as they compete for the same space - this competition continues underground as the roots all strive to gather the same moisture and nutrients.





Replanting them individually will remove this competition and allow us to appreciate each and every flower.



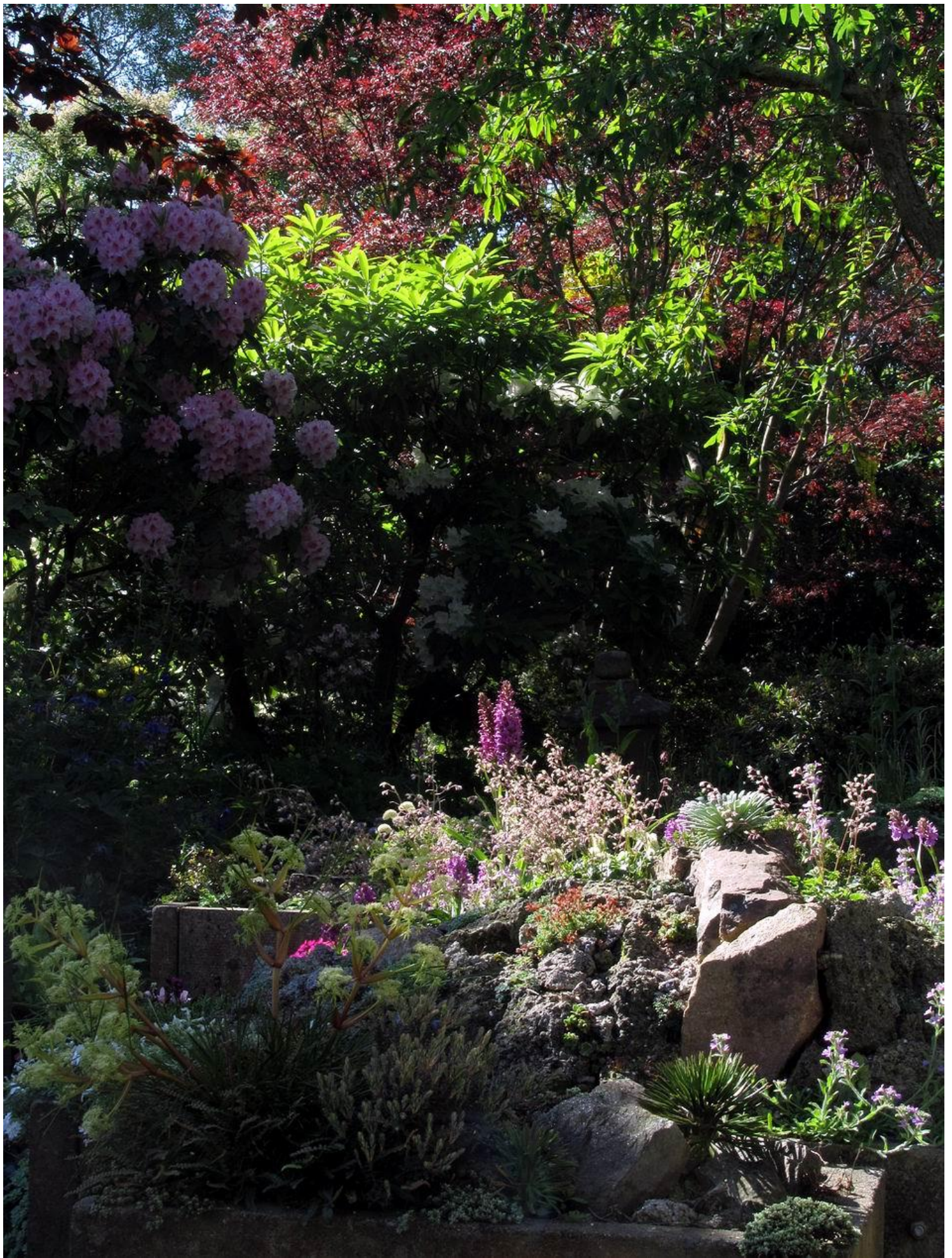
I had to lift this *Fritillaria camschatcensis* bulb early to prevent it being damaged as I split adjacent bulbs but it does give me the opportunity to illustrate that *Fritillaria* replace their bulbs annually. You can see clearly the remains of the old bulb with all the small rice grain like scales withering as they pass their food reserves onto the new white bulb above. Some of the new rice grains can be removed and grown on to become new bulbs – no matter how small the grains they too will only last one year with a new one forming.



The yellowing leaves of *Colchicum agripinum* have collapsed on the rock garden bed - these started out some years ago as two groups of about 5 bulbs in each but now they have now become too many for this area.



I have replanted two groups of five back into the rock garden bed and now I have a basket of spares that can be planted in the space we have reclaimed in the front garden. The space in the front garden will absorb most of our surplus bulbs we get from lifting and dividing this year.



Back to the opening scene - from the swing seat I can fully appreciate the influence of time on the garden - from the fleeting changes of light that can, in a second, dramatically change scene in front of me to the changing colours of the seasons and the inevitable slow growth that builds over many years of our garden journey.....