



BULB LOG 22.....28th May 2014



Tree Peony

We have a few tree peonies in flower just now, both species and cultivars but none more spectacular than the one above. I should qualify that statement the flowers are large and beautiful but the plant looks terrible – a long, 2m, arching stick bent over as it is unable to support the weight of the flower and leaf growth - I have tried over many years to keep it more compact cutting it back hoping to get a number of shorter stem, without success. Perhaps it is partly because it is semi shaded by a large Acer or this may just be its growth



habit in our conditions— as soon as the flowers go past I am going to cut it down to some 30cms high and keep my fingers crossed. Sometimes the time comes when it is worth trying extreme measures to get a plant back into shape and you have to accept whatever the result may be whether it is success or total loss of the plant.



Paeonia lutea* var *ludlowii

We do cut back tree peonies on a regular basis and they always bud back even from the base of the plant. *Paeonia lutea ludlowii* is a very large plant reaching up to over 3m high with a big spread and for many years we have had to thin out the growth, to keep open as much planting space below as possible, cutting the stems back activates dormant buds from below.



Calochortus uniflorus

We are in the final phase of flowering in the bulb houses before they all retreat to a dry summer rest.

Calochortus uniflorus is one of the few bulbs still in bloom – I love the contrast between those wonderful blue anthers, the violet hues of the seed capsule and petals - hard to think how you could improve on this until you see the form below with the added dark highlights. When the anthers dehisce the contrast is less dramatic with the blue colour being replaced by the creamy white pollen.



Calochortus uniflorus

I have grown many other *Calochortus* species over the years but as with the tree peony I struggled to prevent them growing tall and spindly, which causes them to flop over. I can control the watering and to a lesser extent the temperatures in the bulb houses but I cannot control the light levels that these bulbs would have in their habitat. Our low northern light causes many bulbs to grow taller than they would under habitat conditions but many *Calochortus* grow through scrub and have a tendency to be taller in the wild. I decided that no matter how beautiful their flowers are it was not worth my efforts and our limited space could be better used for plants that will better tolerate our conditions.. Happily I am able to grow *Calochortus uniflorus* with reasonable success.



Tropaeolum azureum

Tropaeolum azureum and *Tropaeolum tricolorum* are in flower in both the bulb house and the frit house where they self-seed into the sand plunge as well as into pots of bulbs.



Tropaeolum tricolorum



This year is the first time we have grown **Allium 'Camelion'** I suspect it was named for the changing colour of the flowers which start pure white then turn shades of pink as they age.



Nothoscordum ostenii



This year I am replacing the remaining plunges in the bulb houses, this 'U' shaped unit replaces the old plunge where I was growing bulbs directly in the sand – I will continue with that in this new version. I have the units for the Fritillary house which will be fitted when the plants go fully dormant.



Hyacinthoides hispanica

There is a tendency among growers to favour 'rare' plants disregarding those that are considered common or easy – I try not to fall into that trap. I do like trying out new plants but always like to accommodate the good old favourites. Due to this year's weather we have a bit more of time a gap between successive flowerings than in most years – the recent cold conditions have slowed down the development of some flowers while those that were out were spoiled quickly by being constantly cold and wet. Not so *Hyacinthoides hispanica* it is flowering through all that the weather throws at it.



A simple chance planting of a fern and Bluebells makes a very attractive backdrop to one of my old curling stones.



Hyacinthoides non scripta

Hyacinthoides non scripta is the 'other' Bluebell – wherever these species come together a whole range of hybrids will appear.

The promiscuity of these plants is leading to worries that many of the traditional Hyacinthoides non scripta 'BlueBell' woods in the UK are in danger from being replaced by the more vigorous *H. hispanica* and the hybrids.

Here hybrid bluebells form a back drop to *Uvularia grandiflora*.

You do need to control the spread of these Bluebells which spread both by seed and by division of the bulbs but we should not hold the success of a plant against it – they are excellent garden plants.



Uvularia grandiflora



Ferns are also good reliable garden plants -some spread around freely and also need to be controlled while other selected forms are not always fertile and are much slower to increase.



While I am on the subject of controlling plants I should also mention *Dicentra*, *Corydalis*, *Arisaema*, and many others which, if they like your conditions, can go on the rampage – but I would not want to have a garden without the decorative effects they bring especially when used in mixed plantings. I will be dead heading all the *Dicentra* flowers to prevent them seeding further as well as thinning out the creeping rhizomes in the next month.



The beautiful spotted leaves of a *Podophyllum* peek out through a carpet of *Corydalis* and *Dicentra*.



The leaves of **Podophyllum hexandrum** appear almost black when they first emerge making a startling contrast with the pinky white flowers but some green quickly develops between the brown blotching.





The clusters of dark flowers of **Podophyllum pleianthum** hide below the large leaves with their ghostly, pale undersides.



Paris japonica has been in flower for a week or two and I am particularly pleased to see that the plant is increasing at the base with several new offsets forming.



Haberlea rhodopensis



Ramonda nathaliae

Elsewhere in troughs and raised beds Haberlea and Ramonda species are flowering.....