



**BULB LOG 24.....17<sup>th</sup> June 2015**





The feedback that I have had since my recent musings on troughs, both here and on the BBC, has further reinforced my belief in the attraction of this form of gardening. They seem to appeal right across the board from the young to the old appealing, to non-gardeners as well as experienced growers all want to try out this form of creating landscapes and growing plants.

As a result I am again devoting this week's Bulb Log to looking at some more of our many troughs. I view each trough not as a miniature garden but as a mini environment, or more correctly a small landscape containing a number of micro environments. A flat landscaped trough has but one aspect - mounding up and landscaping high immediately expands that to multiple aspects.

Our troughs represent forty years and as a result display all stages of a trough from newly planted, to mature then into old age and decline (much like the gardeners!). The oldest surviving trough plantings we have are established thirty years now but these are exceptional, ironically they are landscaped on the flat before I developed my favoured style of building up, their success is down to the plants in them. Two are dominated by *Dianthus alpinus* and small forms of *Primula marginata*, one has the addition of a tiny *Hebe* and the other has been colonised by self-sown *Dactylorhiza* along with *Oxalis laciniata*. The third and oldest was originally planted up with several



saxifrages however one, *Saxifraga cochlearis minor*, has completely taken over covering the entire metre long trough. Following on this lesson from nature I have planted up some troughs with just a single species only to watch other plants choosing to be included by self-seeding in - often growing through each other forming a community. This showed me that if I create suitable environments plants will establish themselves and this has been a favoured method - I first build a landscape then slowly introduce plants, usually as small cuttings or even seed, then enjoy watching the natural progress.





Miniature troughs made of cement landscaped with concrete. Early cement trough made in wooden mould.



Cement coated fish box troughs landscaped with limestone marl.



Granite trough carved from Victorian paving slab with slate landscape. Cement-coated fish box with sandstone.



Cement-coated fish box trough landscaped with concrete. Cement trough moulded using cardboard boxes.





Two more granite troughs I carved from Victorian paving slabs.



Cement trough formed in wooden mould; NZ plants. Cement-covered fish box; landscape of limestone marl.



Sandstone trough landscaped using limestone marl.

Cement-covered fish box volcanic rock.



Cement-covered fish box troughs the one on the left landscaped with broken cement and planted with a single silver saxifrage, the Orchid sowed itself. On the right an old, tired planting between the small rounded granite stones may get rejuvenated or I may just sow some seeds and see what takes.





Sandstone trough with limestone landscape: this one has been waiting a few years to be planted. A group of troughs with some of the bonsai trees complement each other



Cement trough moulded using cardboard boxes.



Granite paving slab trough



Two of the oldest plantings



Cement trough full of Iris.



Polystyrene trough shared by *Sanguinaria canadense* and *Galanthus nivalis*.





Large troughs or raised slab beds made by bolting paving slabs together – granite troughs in foreground.



Slab bed with *Edrianthus serpyllifolius* in full bloom.





I am still happy with this landscaping but the planting is getting tired and I will re work it preserving the best of what is there and introducing a few new plants.



I reworked this slab bed a few years ago adding broken concrete to the granite to help raise up the right hand side.





Sandstone trough taken over by a saxifrage. Cardboard box moulded cement trough; limestone landscape.



Cement-covered fish box with granite stone and a small cement trough landscaped high with roofing slates.



Cardboard box moulded cement trough



Polystyrene fish box covered in cement waiting to be landscaped. Old trough we bought thirty five years ago.





We bought this lovely moulded trough thirty plus years ago it is planted with two dwarf conifers. Group of old trough:s the front two are planted with Rhodohpoxis and get lifted into a bulb house for the winter.



Cement-covered fish boxes, one landscaped with roofing slates the other with broken concrete.



Two recent troughs landscaped with broken concrete the one on the right has not been fully planted yet.



Cement covered fish boxes, the left hand one was planted up using unrooted saxifrage cuttings over a year ago the other was planted recently using some saxifrage plants I bought.





Old cement troughs I made using wooden moulds. All these are landscaped using broken concrete block.



Cement-covered polystyrene fish boxes.



Cement-covered polystyrene fish boxes.



Cement-covered polystyrene (Styrofoam) fish boxes.





Cement-covered polystyrene fish box.



Sand-covered polystyrene box.

A polystyrene fish box makes an ideal box for cuttings I used to just paint them but regular usage caused the paint to erode allowing the white to show through so I now paint them with waterproof PVA glue which is coated with fine dry sand, I apply three layers of this allowing each to dry first – this is much more durable.



Miniature trough, 24cm across, landscaped and planted with cuttings in 2008.

I hope that these images give you some ideas to try out for yourself, as you can see if you create a good landscape the trough will always look good not matter what you grow, one of those above I never got round to planting up and has not much more than liverwort and mosses growing in it . However when you do combine a good landscape with good plantings the effect can be so rewarding and you can move them around – it is the ultimate in mobile gardening.





This picture sums up my method of creating an environment that plants are happy in. I sowed seed of *Edrianthus serpyllifolius* in this slab bed a number of years ago and now it self-seeds around even growing through some of the saxifrage mats.....