BULB LOG 38.....23rd September 2015

Coprinopsis lagopus

I get just as excited by fungi appearing in the garden as I do about any of the so called rare plants we try to grow. I just love nature - and gardening is a way we can bring nature literally right to our own back door – I have often described what we do not as gardening but as habitat manipulation.

I cannot remember seeing this particular fungus in the garden before - I first noticed the furry shoots appearing in the front garden where early last year we cut back the overgrown shrubs, shredded them and then, after a few months of composting, spread the shreddings back on as a mulch.
Obviously the mycelium is living off the decaying woody mulch where it finds conditions it can thrive in and now we are seeing all these beautiful fruiting bodies.
I was not sure what kind it was so I used the wonderful resource of combined plant knowledge that we have on the SRGC Forum, where we have a special section for Plant Identification, by posting a few pictures and sure enough within a short time I had the answer from Chris Johnson in the Outer Hebrides. Armed with the genus I did some research and feel fairly sure that it is Coprinopsis lagopus.

Crinodendron hookerianum seeds

I know I showed some pictures of Crinodendron hookerianum seeds last week but I want to further share my fascination with these amazing structures that have evolved.

As I noticed the pods were starting to split open I have collected all the pods into a basket where I can save the seed.

Crinodendron hookerianum

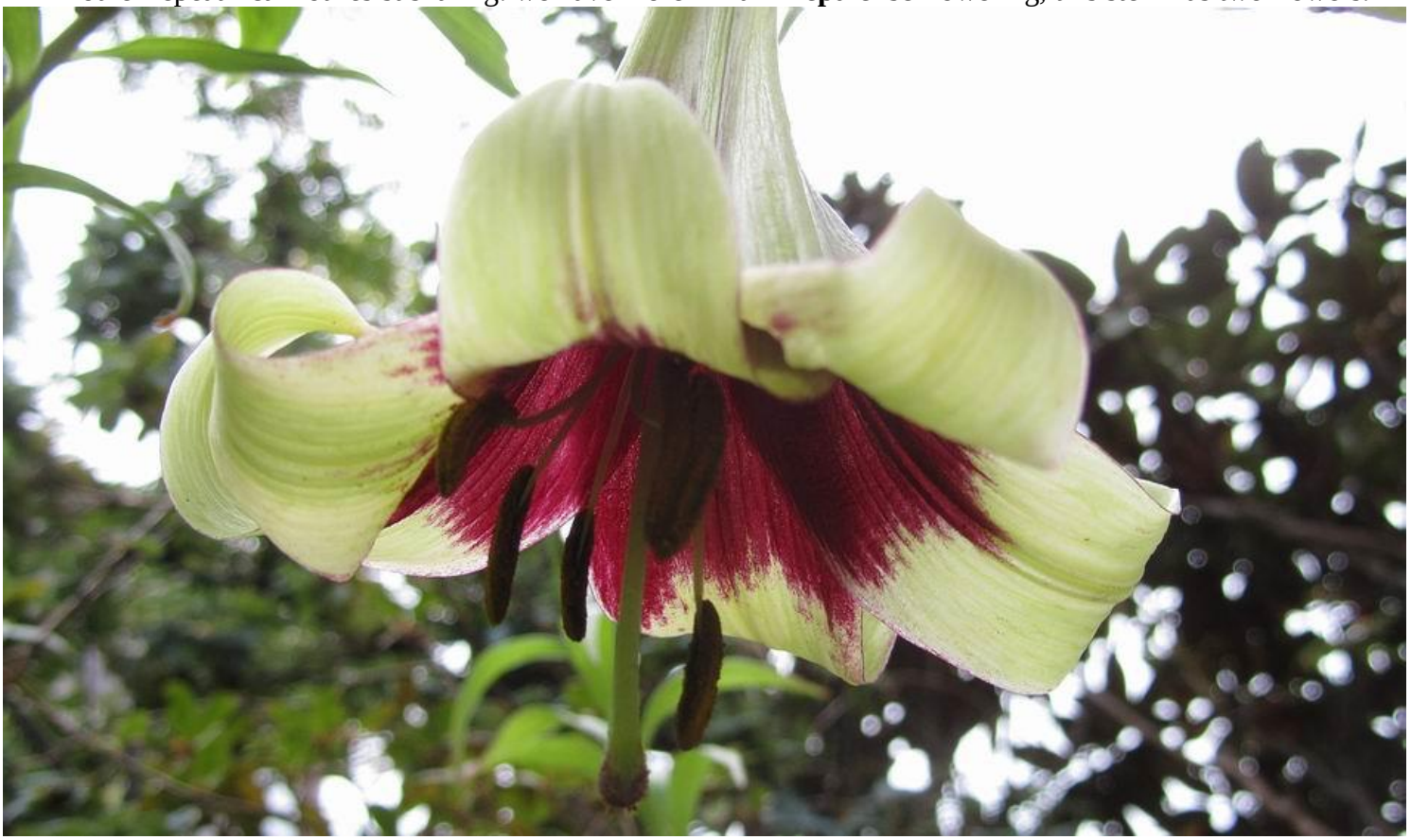
Some late flowers give me the opportunity to compare directly the similarity of the structures it is almost as if the flower has simply morphed into the seed capsule but this is not the case.

Both the flower bud and seed capsule form a closed vessel with five segments that split apart when ripe to reveal the floral parts in the flower and the ripe seeds in the pod.

The section of the flower I cut open reveals the immature seed capsule compete with the tiny cluster of embryo seeds waiting to be fertilised and grow into the large seeds that you see in the ripe capsule.

If you do not already do this I encourage you to pull or cut apart flowers and seed pods so you can fully enjoy the wonderful creations that have evolved in nature.

Another repeat I cannot resist sharing: we have more **Lilium nepalense** flowering, this stem has two flowers.



They are just stunning creations both above and below ground – anyone who has grown this plant will know that it is among a number of lilies that do not always come up where you planted the bulb - the stem runs underground for some distance before appearing.

While my favoured way to introduce plants to the garden is by seed we do buy in bulbs from time to time and this is a lovely group of **Lilium lankongense bulbs** we just received from Pottertons Nursery.

They are in magnificent condition and obviously freshly lifted complete with the running stem, which in this case has run about 40cms before it grew up above the ground. The red pigment on the right indicates where the stem came into the light and like many lilies there is a cluster of stem roots there as well as the roots at the base of the bulb. All along the stolon there are a number of small bulbs and clusters of roots which we hope will form good clumps in the garden.

Hybrid lilies

These large hybrid lilies also form these stem roots above the bulb and will benefit from a good mulch to keep them moist as well as feeding them during the growing season.

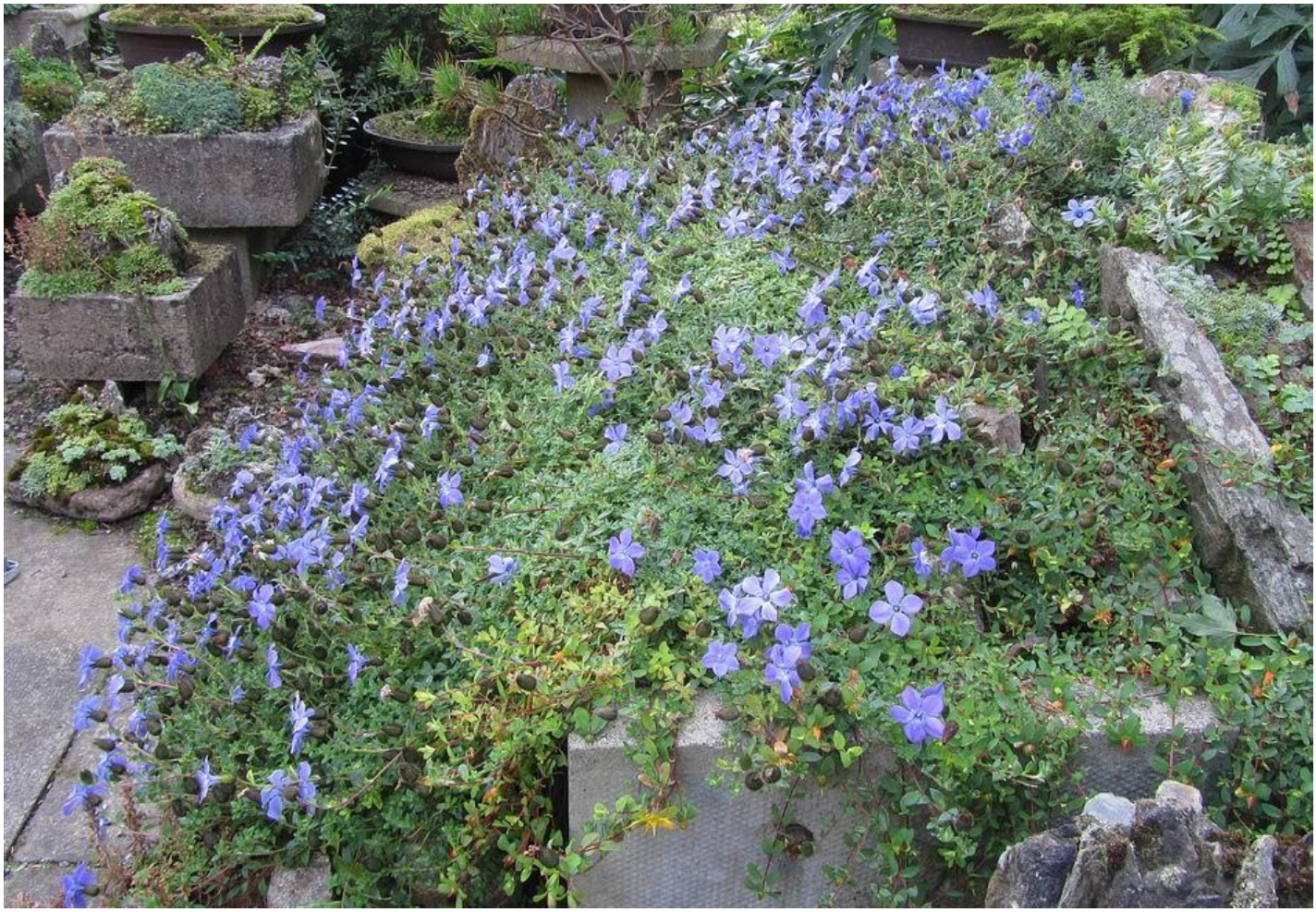
Eucomis bicolor is just coming into flower now.

The flowers of **Cyclamen hederifolium** come in a wide range of colours - these two pictures show the extreme ends of that range in our garden – from the darkest red above to the white form below, growing through Salix hylematica.

Cyclamen hederifolium

The flowers of **Allium wallichii** are only opening now, which shows how the seasons change from year to year: in some previous years they have opened a month earlier than this. You will notice that I refrain from saying that they open later than normal for the simple reason that I do not know what a normal season – each one being different. OK, we can take an average as normal but that tells us nothing, the average sometimes does not even exist it is purely a mathematical calculation – look at clothes sizes the average is worked out by taking the measurements of say 100 people then dividing that number by 100 it may be none of those hundred people are that average size most will be bigger or smaller. Many of us note the date when plants come into flower and then expect them to repeat that each year – this has serious flaws. It is a desire of humans to classify everything so we follow a rigid calendar with months – ancient man used a solar system where they gauged, often with stone circles, the height of the sun in the sky as a guide to the season and so the best time for planting etc. This is much better than our rigid calendar system for gauging growth as the angle of the sun and daylight hours are among the variants the plants respond to. However *when* flowers open is governed by many other factors - daylight, temperature and moisture are among those we can understand but there may be more. These Allium are flowering late in the season, I always think of them as late summer flowers and the solar summer has just ended but our calendar summer ended on the last day of August.

Cyananthus lobatus has been producing a succession of its lovely blue flower for months – the first opened in July and there are still masses to come. They will continue to flower until eventually the frosts cut the growth back.



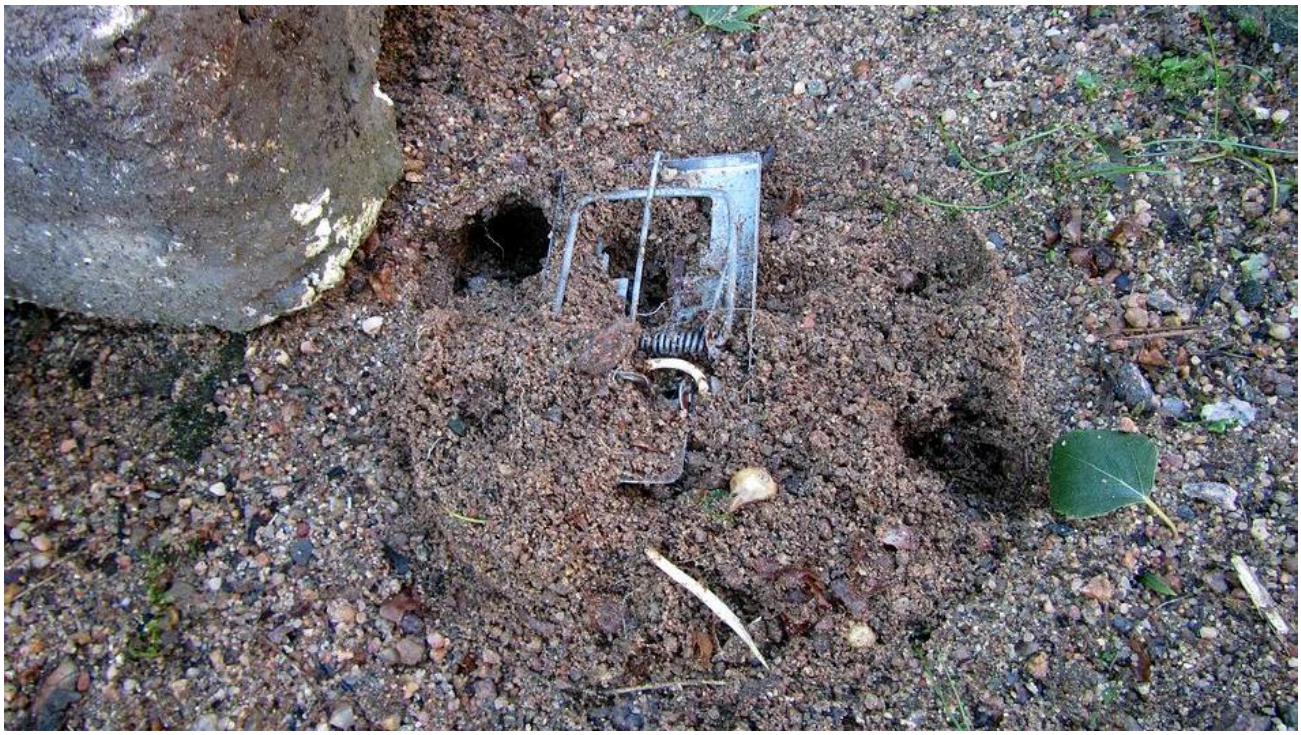
An interesting observation I have often made is how the flowering stems predominately grow in one direction that is roughly towards the north. I do not understand exactly why this is as the bed is in good light with no trees overhead that would shade the light forcing growth in a single direction.

The flowering stems of the later flowering **Cyananthus microphyllus** are doing exactly the same – nearly all are running in a northerly direction. Has anyone else noted this on their plants?

Cyananthus microphyllus

Plants are amazing at adapting to the environment they are in: this Gentian, one of the Septemfida group, was planted at the base of these steps at the same time as the dwarf conifers, I also planted some hepatica which I had to move as the conifers grew shading them out to the extent that they were suffering however the gentian adapts by growing out to the light even resorting to scrambling up through the conifers.

Our colchicums are only now starting into flower – some years they are in flower in August and I had been wondering if something had happened to them but it is just the weather of this season that has delayed their appearance. The fact that we have just had one of the coldest wettest summers for years has to be a factor.



There are other reasons why many of our autumn flowering Crocus are not appearing – the reason is mice. Last year at this time and again this year they are digging and eating the corms, mostly in the sand beds, resulting in huge losses. We have always had mice in the garden and each year they got a few corms but it never really made an impact until I started to grow them in sand beds - perhaps it is too easy to dig in the sand. As you see I did set some traps which the mice ignored preferring to dig out the corms.

Colchicum flowering through the leaves of Epimedium. The problem with them flowering this late is that our autumn weather can be very wet and windy, as it is just now, plus the Colchicum and Crocus extend on a floral tube, not a stem, so they are very susceptible to collapsing. Growing through foliage like this can help support the flowers.

Groups of Colchicum flowers are now starting to appear in various beds catching the eye from some distance.

Here we have another group of fungi growing alongside more Colchicum hybrids.

You can see how many flowers that you can get from a single bulb and as with all bulbs you will get best results or increase and regular flowering if you can lift and divide them every few years. Ideally you should lift them in the summer as the foliage dies back but as the flowers emerge before the roots really get going you can still lift and divide them as the flowers fade……..