



BULB LOG 15.....13th April 2016





As you can tell from the cover picture the weather has turned cold and wet but that cannot take away the excitement that so many plants bring at this time of year. Despite the poor weather conditions the saxifrages are starting to flower – in fact there was a fine drizzle as I took these pictures.



This has been the wettest winter that I can remember with months of cold wet conditions and very little in the way of snow or frost. The constant moisture has proved too much for some of the saxifrages which have simply rotted off - others that have died out in parts will, I hope, regrow. These same plants have come through being frozen into a sheet of ice or snow in previous winters but the constant wetness has proved to be too much.



Not all the plants in a particular part of the trough have died which suggests to me that the problem is more to do with the tolerances of the particular cultivars rather than the planting position. I will learn from this lesson and work on propagating the survivors which would seem to be better suited to our conditions.

When you do find the plants that are best suited to your garden conditions it is amazing how resilient they can be. This small trough was planted up with plant cuttings during a demonstration in 2008 – they are growing in mostly broken concrete with just a small amount

of sharp sand the only care it gets is an occasional watering with a liquid feed during the growing season.



Saxifraga marginata

It is more a case of the plants selecting us than us selecting the plants so it is worth propagating up those long term survivors to use them as the backbone for your plantings. I scattered seed, from a plant of *Saxifraga marginata* growing in a slab bed, into this trough (probably ten years ago) and now there is a healthy colony. Perhaps it is the artist in me that likes the associations that can be formed in the garden – in fact I view the garden as another medium to express my art. The two bonsai trees, one larger and higher than the other, form an interesting relationship with each other as well as with the troughs.



Elsewhere in the garden you can see a similar relationship; this time of two pines, one larger and planted higher up than the other and so you can find such repeated relationships all around the garden, not by accident but by design.

Until a few years ago the pine on the top of raised bed, like the smaller one, formed a dome down to the ground level but I decided to remove the lower branches to both reveal and feature the trunk as well as opening up a valuable habitat and planting area below. When they were both domes their relationship was like the classic ‘mother and child’ so often the subject of art works but that relationship was less obvious after I changed the shape of the larger pine and this has bothered me.

While the small pine is a magnificent specimen it no longer works visually for me within the scene and it is also masking too much of the wall from view and from the potential for planting up between the stones - so we have decided on some drastic action.





It is unlikely that the smaller pine would have survived being lifted and moved – even if we had somewhere to move it to – and besides I wanted to re-establish the relationship where they reflected each other so the loppers came out.

The first thing I did was to look inside the tree to see what the trunk(s) looked like and indeed there were two so we selected the most appropriate one to keep and removed the other completely. More careful pruning followed taking the time to look and imagine what the tree will look like before we remove anything - remembering that once it is cut off you cannot stick it back on. This is where it helps to have two sets of eyes and hands so one can hold a branch back or obscure it from view while the other stands back to see how it will look.

After much deliberation we removed more than two thirds of the growth but I think we are left with a tree that again looks like a smaller version of the larger one re-establishing the relationship that I wanted.

You will notice that there are many more planting opportunities opened up on the wall behind where I want to extend my planting of *Trillium rivale* in addition I now can plant

right up to and around the base of the smaller tree to also mimic the planting on top of the wall.



No matter how small or unlikely it is I am always excited when I open up or recover a planting situation in the garden just as I was when we raised the larger pine a few years ago. My vision was to imitate the scene of a wooded, steep, rocky, river bank I had seen in Oregon, which was covered in *Trillium rivale*. The original pot of flowering sized seedlings are planted on the top and now there are generations of self-sown seedlings all around and down the wall and with my help I can now extend this

around the base of the smaller of the pines. [More from the wall in a Bulb Log Video Diary Supplement.](#)



Plants can also form relationships providing links and continuity around the garden and one of those we use is *Primula marginata*. There are a number of beautiful forms, gifts from the late Hans Hoeller, growing in the wall shown above with others in the rock garden beds as well as the raised beds and troughs.





Erythronium hendersonii

The peak Erythronium season is not far away and depending on our weather most will be in full flower any time from mid-April to mid-May. The early ones, such as *Erythronium hendersonii* are quick to open their flowers whenever the sun does break through the clouds.



Pink **Erythronium revolutum** flowers opening in the spring bed.

Sunshine brings a welcome sparkle to the beds but we must be grateful for the rain as the plants need the moisture



during this season of peak growth. It is that balance of rain and sunshine that allows us to grow so many of the woodland-type bulbs in our garden.

From the left; *Erythronium oregonum*, a pale *Erythronium revolutum* with *Erythronium japonicum* buds in the foreground and still tightly closed yellow *Erythronium 'Susannah'* buds behind.



Fuelled by the rain and encouraged by the occasional periods of warmth the spring growth is quickly hiding the ground that has been exposed through the winter



Corydalis solida and *malkensis* are still flowering as the first of the North American *Erythronium* come into flower.



Trillium kurabayashii is among the earliest of this genus to flower in our garden.



Narcissus pseudonarcissus*, *Erythronium tuolumnense* and *Corydalis malkensis



The new foliage of an **Epimedium** is beautifully back-lit with the light purple flowers of **Dentaria digitata**.



Bowles' Golden Grass self-seeds around and provides pleasing colour combinations with the spring bulbs.



Other pleasing effects are provided by the various types of foliage; here Colchicum leaves come through a carpet of Corydalis and Dicentra foliage along with Trillium chloropetalum.



Colchicums are much maligned because of their leaves- many gardeners cannot seem to cope with the fact that they flower in autumn and the leaves come in spring. Remember when you plant Colchicum to take the leaf growth into account and you can enjoy both the flowers and the leaves. In this bed, below some larger Rhododendrons, we enjoy a beautiful display of colchicum flowers in autumn and in spring their leaves combine with Hellebores in full flower and other early flowering bulbs.



Rhododendron elegantulum

The pink rhododendron on the right hand side of the above picture is *R.elegantulum*. As well as the beautiful flowers it has lovely foliage covered in a golden layer of indumentum, this wears off of the upper surfaces soon after the new leaves emerge but remains on the underside and this can best be appreciated by standing

underneath and looking through from the inside – fortunately this one is large enough for us to do that especially as like most of our larger rhododendrons we have removed the lower branches.



Rhododendron uvariifolium

Rhododendron uvariifolium can also be seen in the picture on the previous page.



Above are the flowers of **Rhododendron pachysanthum**, which I also show below, it is an outstanding plant with silver indumentum covering the new leaves as they emerge.



Rhododendron pachysanthum



The final picture for this week is of **Rhododendron pachysanthum** and **Rhododendron thomsonii** both of which benefit from our cold moist growing conditions as does the tree which is *Acer palmatum* 'Osakazuki'