



BULB LOG 49.....7th December 2016





“The nights are fair drawin’ in” is a common phrase used in these parts as the sun sets earlier and earlier – in recent days we have had some beautiful sunsets featuring bright pink clouds and for a short while after the sun has dipped below the horizon we get this beautiful theatrical effect of the light being reflected back off the clouds - in Scotland this is called the gloaming. It is very difficult to capture with a camera because when you expose for the beautiful sky the garden is blacked out and if you expose for the garden the sky is burnt out completely – here I have tried to find a compromise between the two. With the days shortening and pretty cold temperatures there is not much new growth in the plants, in fact many have either retreated underground or are in the process of doing so.



Towards the bottom of the garden the only evidence above the ground of a large group of mostly self-seeded *Allium wallichii* are the dried stems and seed heads - many still hang on to their precious seeds.

I do collect and scatter some of these seeds onto other parts of the garden where we would like to add their lovely dark flowers – these bloom quite late in the season September/October.



Plants have been taking over the paths in our garden for many years – at one time there were just a few isolated plants towards the edges of the gravel area while the slab walk way was completely clear. Now bulbs and other plants have seeded freely into the gravel with Ericaceous plants such as *Cassiope* and *Phyllodoce* have grown in from either side to completely cover the slabs – matt-forming *Celmisia* are another hazard to be negotiated.



The cold conditions have also slowed down the growth of the flowers in the bulb houses with the flowers that were out lasting a long time while those that are in bud seem frozen in time. It is important to remember that when the temperature rises above freezing, and especially if the sun strikes the glass, the temperature will quickly rise and the bulbs that are in growth will require watering and feeding. During the winter when our outside water source is switched off and I am watering using watering cans - I will always add a small amount, $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ strength, of liquid tomato-type fertiliser to the can.



Crocus caspius



Galanthus shoots are evident both under glass and in the garden with the promise of flowers to come in the early part of the year.



Some snowdrops flower in the autumn, like **Galanthus reginae olgae** – we can only grow this plant under glass it is simply not hardy in our conditions so far we have lost every one we have tried in the open garden. I say so far because I will continue to try with different clones as well as trying different positions in the garden – it is a fact that conditions can be such that moving a plant even a short distance in the garden can make a difference to the survival of plants.



The flowers of this **Crocus ochroleucus** are lasting longer because the cold weather has prevented them from being pollinated and fertilised.



**Crocus
goullymii
'Sofia Agia'
MJ9562**

The temperature at which crocus flowers open varies depending on the species and in some cases it varies between clones. Light is also a factor in when they open and all this will have evolved in response to the conditions of their native habitat.

The lovely glaucous grey/green buds of **Corydalis oppositifolia kurdica** are pushing through but will wait until the light and temperatures rise in the spring before they eventually flower.



There are some more Narcissus flowers opening in the sand bed – these are all more advanced than are the same clones growing in pots. The main differences between bulbs growing in the sand and a pot is that the roots have a free run into the sand which also has a bigger volume resulting in a more stable condition with smaller variations in temperature and moisture levels at the roots.



Crocus laevigatus growing in the sand also stay more compact than they do in a pot.



There are plenty narcissus buds pushing through so there will be many flowers to come when the conditions are favourable.



The taxonomy of *Narcissus* in cultivation can be complicated – at least in the wild where there are isolated populations you can start to distinguish variations that can be classified into a species. When they have been in cultivation for a number of years, grown in close proximity to each other and raised through successive generations of seed they start to interbreed and identification to a species becomes difficult if not impossible.

The flower above is close to ***Narcissus cantabricus* var *monophyllus*** with beautiful crystal white flowers.



On the left is one of the many garden seed raised *Narcissus* hybrids that I have raised. I have long ceased to try and put a name to them - they are all lovely and only if a cultivar shows particular promise will I increase it clonally.



Stepping back out of the bulb houses here is a short review of how some of the many troughs are looking as they head into a winter.



The majority of the troughs in the previous image and these next few are made from polystyrene fish boxes, landscaped with broken concrete block and filled with sharp sand.



This one looks particularly sorry for itself but all is not as bad as it seems – the outer leaves of the masses of *Saxifraga brunonis* rosettes that have colonised the entire trough go brown and die back, when they start back into growth in the spring they will turn a beautiful green.



Some of the saxifrage having grown healthily for a few years did not like the very long wet winter we endured last year. Those that survived continue to grow well while some that were reduced to just a few rosettes are now making a recovery.



Another group of troughs of various types.



If you look carefully at the Sorbus tree to the right you will see where I have started to cut back some of the lower branches. These were overhanging the troughs raised beds and plunges reducing the amount of light and rain falling on to the plantings below. The Cotoneaster tree behind and to the left, still in leaf, is due to be taken down altogether this winter – it has served its purpose and given height to this area for many years but now other trees and shrubs have grown there are simply too many shading out the ground below.



A wider view across the slab beds.



I shredded and chipped all the prunings and piled them in beds to compost for a few months over the winter. I will spread them out as a mulch in January or February before the bulbs start to come through – I will add a light scattering of a 7-7-7 N-P-K ‘Growmore’ type fertiliser at the same time. The trunk on the right is the tree that will come down but I don’t think I will be able to remove the root ball.



Having mulched the garden with organic matter for the best part of forty years many fungi appear in the autumn.

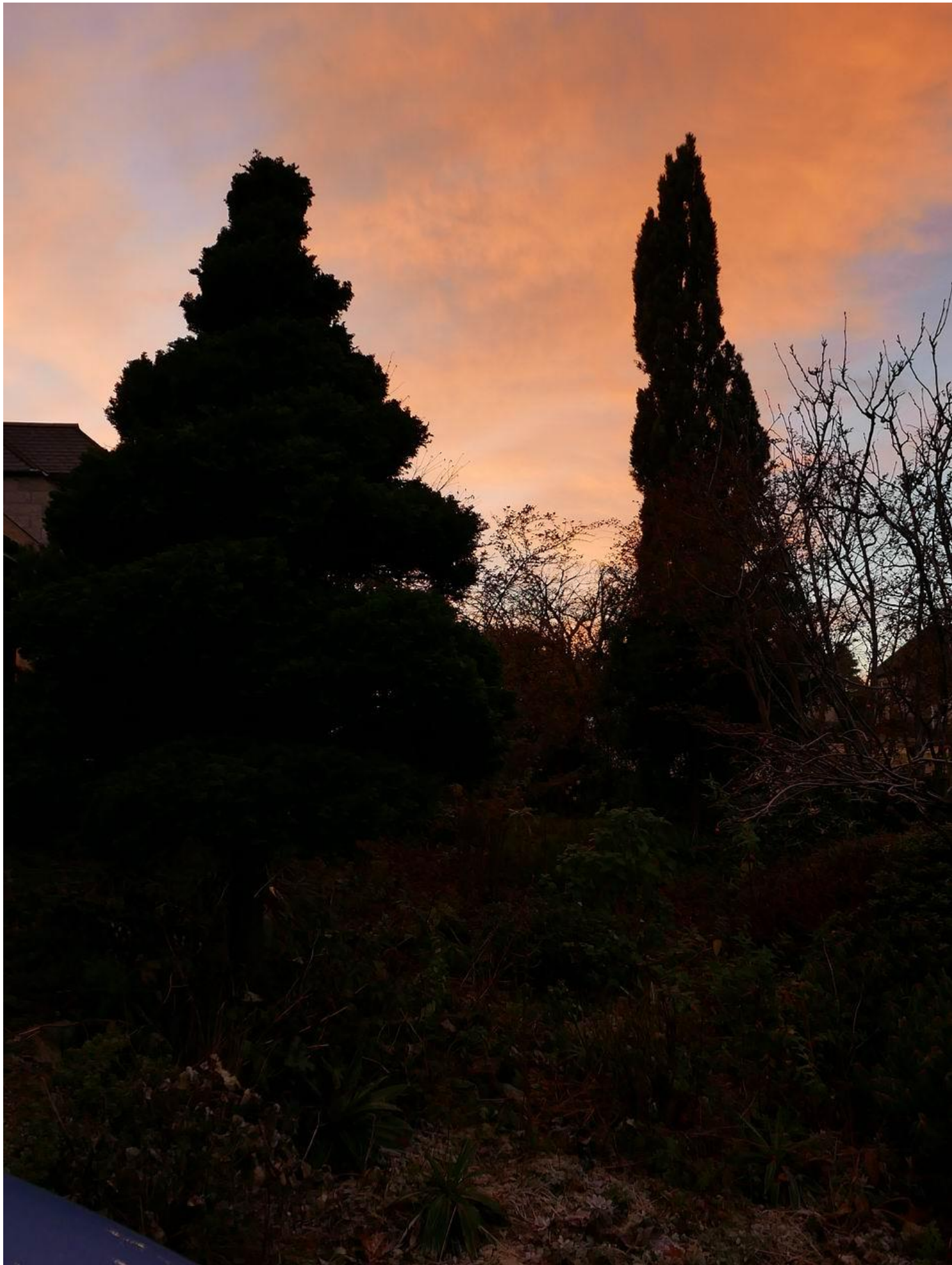


I am very happy to see them as I think it shows that we have a healthy living natural soil.



Fungi





I leave you this week with the front garden in the gloaming.....