



BULB LOG 06.....10th February 2016





The Bulb Log returns to a more familiar pattern this week now that I have almost completed writing the chapters for my E-book 'Erythroniums in cultivation'. I just have to find time to do one more edit of everything I have written so far before combining them into a single PDF for downloading. Now the daylight hours are extending we are seeing the early flowering bulbs appearing through the leaves and debris of last season's growth. The continual bad weather we have experienced this winter has prevented me from getting the tidying up work done until now. For months the garden has been soaked by frequent rain and on the few periods when it was dry everything was frozen to the ground.



Eranthis hyemalis

It is two weeks now since I saw the first signs of the yellow *Eranthis hyemalis* flowers pushing their way through the ground to get their flowers above the layer of fallen leaves. Now there are many more yellow buds which are, like me, waiting for a bit of sunshine to warm the air and so encourage them to open their flowers fully.



Spring bulb bed

Above is the spring bulb bed with all the debris of last season's growth all of which needs removing and replaced with a fresh mulch from the compost heaps. I need to get this done now, while it is a relatively easy task, because once the mass of bulbs start shooting through it becomes increasingly difficult to add mulch without damaging the young shoots.

The circle in the above picture highlights a clump of lily bulbs, with what remains of its long flowering stems radiating out across the ground.

In the years since I first planted a single bulb it has increased to a large clump of tightly packed bulbs which I want to move to another location.

As each year new bulbs form on top of the previous ones they have now reached the point where they are already half out of the ground so lifting them was easy.





Lily Bulbs

Here I am holding the clump of lily bulbs to show you just how large it has become - it weighs in at 8kgs, the same weight as one of our Westie dogs.

I will split this clump into individual bulbs before planting them along the back bed but for now it is in a temporary home covered in some mulch.

Below you can see the bed which I have now tidied up removing any weeds and then spreading a good mulch of compost – ready for spring!





All the material that I am removing from the beds including anything I need to cutback will be added to the compost heaps which along with all the growth we cut back over the year including the shredded hedge, shrub and tree prunings is what goes into our compost. The biggest volume of material is added to the compost heaps when we are hedge cutting in summer and now last year's clippings have composted turning into a humus rich mulch that will help retain moisture, keep down weeds as well as recycling all the goodness back into the garden.

Mulching this way every year means that we do not have to add much in the way of additional fertiliser to the garden except for a light sprinkling of 7-7-7 'Growmore' when I feel the plants are showing signs of needing it. The signs I look for that might indicate the plants are lacking in nitrogen and the other main nutrients are weak growth and yellowing of the leaves.

It has been many years since I last added any additional feed so this year I have scattered a very small amount, less than half the recommended dose, to these beds before I added the mulch. I add the feed now so that the nutrients are available to the early spring bulbs when they are in the process of growing leaves, stems and roots.



Molly, who is the same weight as the clump of lily bulbs, watches to see I am doing my job properly.



I take care, when I am adding the mulch to the beds, not to damage any of the snowdrops that are also coming through.

I apply this annual heavy mulch to maintain the humus content of our light sandy soil. In many of our beds I try to create the woodland type soils that the bulbs we grow would encounter in their native habitat but we also have some beds where we are trying to create a more open, more freely draining gritty soil – like the bulb bed below.



The main reason I apply a thin mulch to this bed is to help reduce the growth of moss and liverwort so the material I use is shredded and composted woody prunings along with used 6mm gravel top dressing and the contents of any old seed pots that have not germinated after a few years. It is always a nice surprise when an occasional long dormant seed tipped out with the contents of the seed pot germinates here many years after it was sown.



When I have finished weeding and tidying the bed I will apply a thin layer of woody gritty mulch.



The early growth in this bulb bed is mainly from Galanthus.



Ypsilandra

I am always fascinated to see how the growth of some plants can be improved simply by moving them to another location within the garden. This Ypsilandra was getting a bit lost in another bed where it was in competition with taller and more vigorous plants. Last year I decided to move it to the area I had opened up and reclaimed when I removed the lower branches of this Pine.

The Ypsilandra is not only growing more strongly now but in this raised position we are better able to enjoy its flowers.



These flowers on **Crocus abantensis** have been up for a few weeks now but with the bad weather conditions they have never managed to open – I fear now that they will simply fade away this year without showing their beautiful faces.

Cyclamen coum

No matter what the weather Cyclamen coum flowers slowly emerge from their buds.

These Cyclamen coum are flowering and self-seeding around in the sand bed which is the only place in our garden where they will grow really well.





I still have a lot of tidying to do in the rock garden bed which still has a covering of leaves and berries blown off the Cotoneaster trees during the storms. Here at the shady end of the bed we grow Ramonda, Haberlea and Hepatica with Iris 'Katharine Hodgkin' now in flower. One of the great advantages of the Internet is just how easy it is for us to communicate and share information with each other across the various platforms. On the day I posted last week's Bulb Log I got a message from Alan

McMurtrie generously sharing his detailed and expert observations on the pollination within the reticulate Iris where he states:-

"..that the stigmatic lip is designed to prevent selfing. i.e. how a bee lands on the fall, goes down to the base of the flower to get nectar and in doing so, flips the stigmatic lip which picks up pollen from the bee's furry back -- pollen that came from other flowers. As the bee gets to the nectar his upper back is now picking up pollen from this flower's anther. When the bee is finished, it backs out of the flower, and in doing so the fur on its lower back flips the lip closed before any of the flower's own pollen can get on the inner side of the stigmatic lip.

The other point is, that although ripe pollen looks fluffy to the naked eye, interspecies hybrids have misshapen pollen. You see this by looking at it under a microscope -- it's essentially garbage. Trying to make

crosses with it is a waste of time. When I point this out people say, "Well maybe it will work." So I respond, "Go ahead, give it a try. I was simply giving you the head's up." Their thought is, maybe one in a million pollen grains will work (with so many pollen grains perhaps a better wording is one in a billion will work)".





While they still look so attractive I am always a bit reluctant to cut back the growth of the winter green ferns.



However the time has come and I steel myself and remove last year's fronds. Now we will be able to enjoy the lovely new growth that will soon emerge as well as giving the closely planted spring bulbs some space to come through and flower.



It is also the time for me to remove last year's leaves from the Hepatica which will allow the flowers and new growth to emerge unhindered by the remains of the old leaves.



A cluster of nice fat Hepatica buds.



Yellow flowered Helleborus

Similarly I am removing the old leaves from the various hellebores; one of the many jobs that I hope to get done in the garden over the coming week.....