



BULB LOG 20.....18th May 2016



A **Trillium erectum** hybrid, **Anemone ranunculoides** and **Pteridophyllum racemosum** combine beautifully together on the cover picture which nicely introduces two of the topics featuring in this week's Bulb Log.



The generic name *Pteridophyllum* alludes to the fern like foliage of this graceful woodland beauty from Japan and it comes into flower at exactly the same time as many ferns are unfurling their fronds in the most dramatic and sculptural way. What ferns can bring to a garden more than makes up for the absence of flowers. For more than a week their emerging fronds perform a slow motion cross between ballet and sculpture forming the most fantastic and decorative shapes.





Their decorative qualities continue as the fronds develop - some typically are fern-green while others have contrasting rust coloured stems and attachments to enhance their interest. Many form clumps while others such as *Matteuccia struthiopteris*, above, send out runners which I rather like as the *Rodgersia* sp. also shown does exactly the same and I am never quite sure from year to year where they will next perform this annual dance. The runners are easily removed if I do not approve of them where they appear.



Now that the main flush of spring flowers is waning, foliage plays an increasingly important role in my attempts to create great carpets of different shapes, colour and textures across the garden. I am not interested in having isolated



specimen plants instead I want the garden to have the feel of a landscape, such as I see in nature, with great sweeps of plants growing as companions and completely covering the ground.

Perhaps you have noticed the large leaves of **Cardiocrinum giganteum** which, when you look closely, show the start of the flower spikes that will rise up and produce their beautifully scented flowers later in the season.



We cannot have full control over what part of nature comes into our gardens: I am comfortable at the moment with these Shield bugs as they are relatively scarce, (obviously there will be more!) however this morning I spotted a single Lily beetle and that did not last long enough to get its picture taken.



It is not just the insects that are in the family mood this Dunnock is gathering nesting material, not Westie fur this time but some grey hairs cut from this Bulb Despot after my recent trim.

Saxifraga longifolia

Our single specimen of *Saxifraga longifolia* has been growing on these rocks for many years and this year it has decided it is going to flower. Over the next several weeks the red bud in the centre of the rosette will grow upwards producing a dense spray of flowers – as it is monocarpic I hope that it is self-compatible and will set seed



to continue its line, if not we may end up with hybrid offspring – either way would be good.



One of my very natural style troughs is maturing nicely. Gardening is about patience, despite all the TV shows, it is not possible to attain an instant long lasting effect in your garden. I have had a love-hate relationship with this trough for a number of

years - loving the effect of it in full growth, with the orchids flowering, then hating its lack of form in the winter however at last it has reached a state of maturity that gives me pleasure year round.

The smaller Willows are another group of plants in which I have had my interest renewed. Although I am not familiar with their names I have been gathering as many as I can, mostly by scrounging cuttings from friends. Fortunately the majority of them are very easy to root and as a result I have made and planted a few troughs with only dwarf willows.



Some dwarf willows were among the first plants we brought into the garden and are very well established.



It is the very low growing alpine or arctic type plants that I am interested in – one I do know the name of is the rock-hugging, spreading *Salix hylematica*, this is in full flower with its masses of red catkins.



Having spent most of last year and the past winter complaining of the persistent rain now, just when our plants need moisture most, we have had a dry few weeks. One of the most commonly asked questions is 'what is your rainfall' - a figure that should only be considered along with 'what is your evaporation rate'. In our cool northern garden the evaporation rate is usually very low in line with the temperatures so a little rain can go a long way. These last few weeks have been sunny and warm by our standards and to add further to the evaporation factor it has also been windy. The result is that the garden is very dry and badly in need of moisture so I have been watering the frames and some recently planted areas.

Above you can see how different plants cope with lack of moisture – the leaves of *Dicentra cucularia* have collapsed completely while those of the *Erythronium* are still relatively turgid. This is easily explained when you know that the *Erythronium* bulbs take themselves deep into the ground while the *Dicentra* grow in the top few centimeters which can dry out rapidly. I made a mistake planting the *Dicentra* in this small bed as it is too dominant and I thought I had moved it all last year - obviously I left some but now I will get in and move it to another spot where it can grow happily. Covering the ground with plants not only looks good it also one of the best ways of preserving moisture as leaves shade the ground from sunlight and prevent the drying effect of the winds.



Erythronium grandiflorum - a single white flower of **Erythronium montanum** sneaks in to the bottom left.



We are at the tail end of the Erythronium flowering season with this group of **Erythronium japonicum** flowering some weeks after the first of this species bloomed, this extended season is one of the many advantages of raising plants from seed.



Another advantage of raising from seed is the variation you will get in form - and sometimes hybrids appear. You should easily spot a hybrid in this basket of Erythronium californicum seedlings. With the large number of Erythroniums we grow hybridisation is inevitable and it is great fun

looking for those with the best features that make them stand out from the rest.



I have been observing this group of self-sown *Erythronium revolutum* seedlings for a number of years now - it is a vigorous grower with good leaves.

I lifted the best of the sibling seedlings for further assessment but left this group where they were because I am not keen on the double flowers it is producing. The first time it happened I thought it may be an aberration and would not recur but every year now a number of the flowers go from extra petals through to having two of everything as you can see in the picture.





Now for the hybrid seedlings I lifted from that area - here are two growing in plunge baskets where I am assessing two main things one is how different or desirable are their looks and secondly how well will they grow and increase.

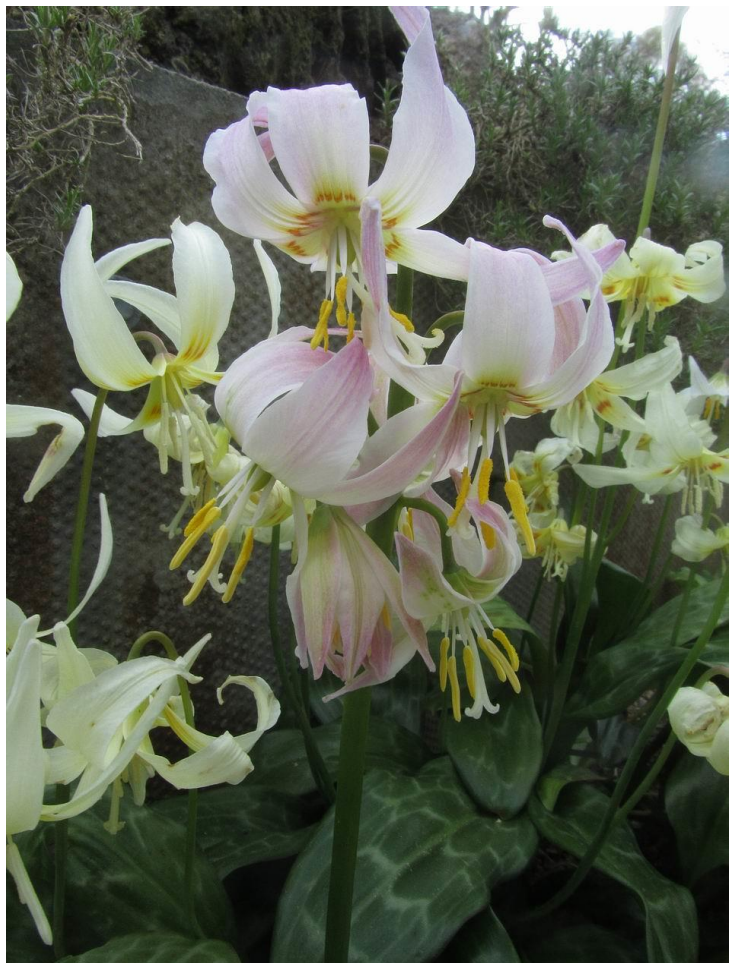


Erythronium hybrids

Of these two I prefer the way the flowers on the left hand one are spaced out towards the top of the stem rather than the right hand one where the three flowers are held in a cluster at the very top.



Same two *Erythronium revolutum* hybrids as shown above.



We have many such hybrids mostly involving *Erythronium revolutum* and *Erythronium californicum* all over the garden, I will only name and distribute the very best after having assessed them for a number of years.



Erythronium hybrid where the flowers go from white to pink after a few days.



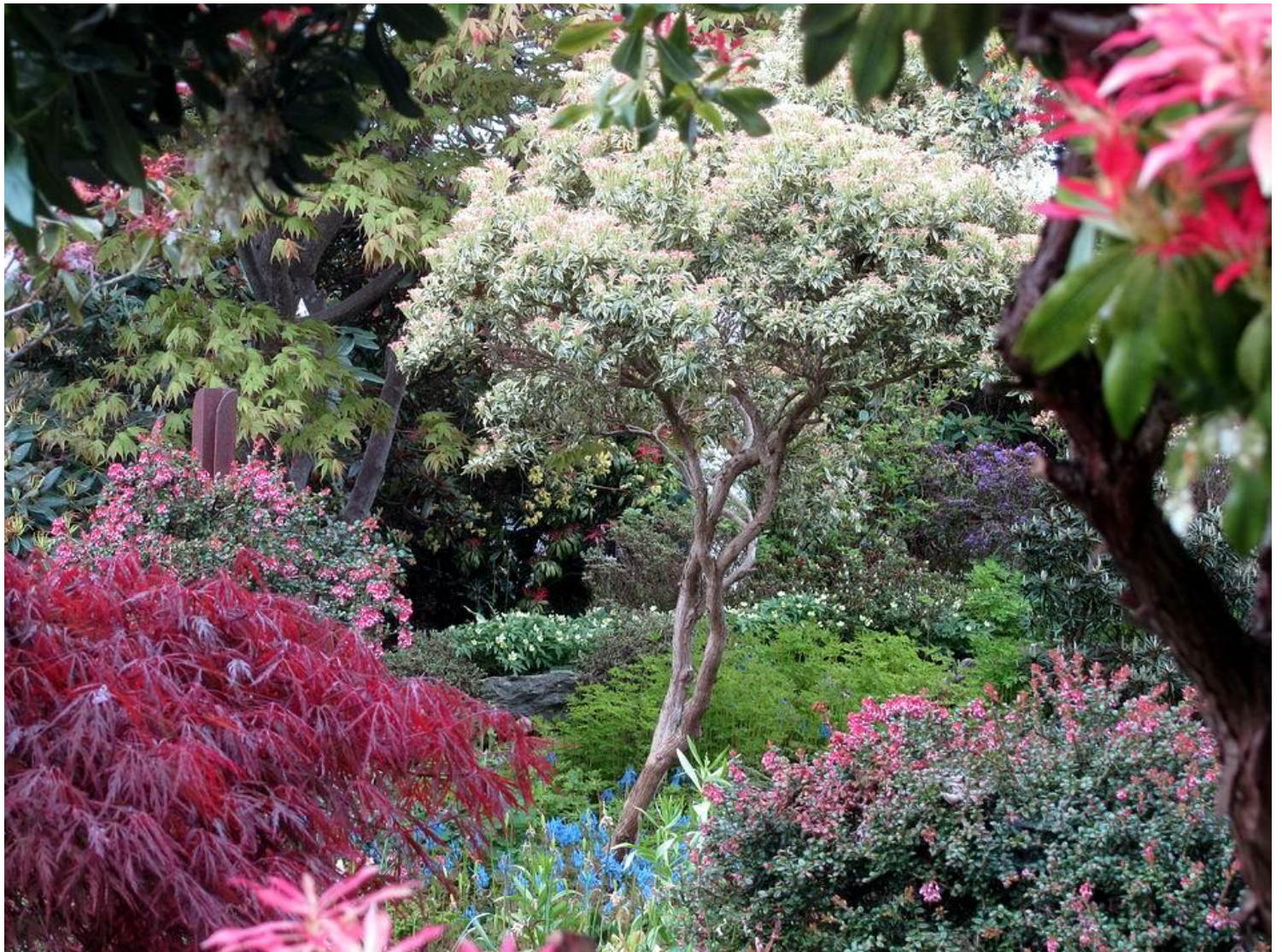
The next series of views across the garden are all about combining plants to form naturalistic plantings reminiscent of a natural landscape.





As I walk around the garden vistas, views and vignettes, changing momentarily with the light, open up to my camera.







I am constantly wondering if it is possible for me to have a naturalistic style of planting in the Bulb house or if I will always have to have to compromise by growing bulbs in pots. For the meantime I like my natural shading in the form of **Tropaeolum tricolorum** growing up the south wall of the bulb house. The tubers are planted in a fish box on the lower shelf of the staging where they are in shade while the stems climb upwards to the light.





In the other bulb house where I am planting directly into the sand plunge it is **Tropaeolum azureum** that dominates.



Tropaeolum azureum



Tropaeolum azureum and Tropaeolum tricolorum

Somehow a Tropaeolum tricolorum tuber got in but the mixed colour effect is rather good. Until next week click the link to join me on a walk round the garden after a night of welcome rain [Video Diary Supplement](#).....