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Bulb Log Diary

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BULB LOG 50.....11th December 2019



Crocus laevigatus



Crocus laevigatus

The beautiful compact flowers of *Crocus laevigatus* bring us great pleasure as the colours brighten the dark days of winter.

As different clones can flower some months apart this species has the longest period of flowering of all the species that we grow. The ones I show here are growing in the bulb houses, either in pots or the sand beds, but we also have it growing outside.



Crocus laevigatus



Crocus goulimyi growing in a 7cm plastic pot.



The pure white **Crocus ochroleucus albus** and a form of **Narcissus albidus**, both flowering in a sand bed.



***Sternbergia lutea*, *Crocus ochroleucus* (note the yellow throat) and *Galanthus reginae olgae*.**



Galanthus reginae olgae

Ensuring the bulbs have sufficient water to support their winter growth is important, especially as our weather has not been that cold. I would not water when it is freezing but the dark blanket of cloud has kept the temperatures relatively mild allowing for growth so I have been watering. When watering the sand beds I add around half strength tomato type liquid fertiliser. Unfortunately the dark conditions also lead to etiolated growth when the plants desperately push upwards seeking better light.



Narcissus albidus

We now have a handful of Narcissus in flower but by this time most years we would have many more in flower; you only need to check back previous Bulb Logs around this time to see that. It is not that we will fail to get flowers because there are plenty of buds showing, but they are just going to flower later this season.



Narcissus romieuxii



At last I got a dry weather window to be able to make a start to clearing the fallen leaves, cut back the remains of old growth and prepare the beds for the new seasons growth. Some plants such as the large *Cyclamen hederifolium* seen here take advantage of the lack of competition and have already a good growth of new leaves which will stay green for months until they eventually die back next summer.



When I say the weather was dry I mean it was not actually raining but the ground and leaves remained very wet so I could not use the leaf-vac, which clogs up when the leaves are so wet, however I could use the blower along with the good old methods of the snow shovel and hand scoops.



Newly lifted, one year old and two year old leaves.

The autumn leaf fall is not a waste product to be disposed of but a valuable resource, essential to retain a healthy soil so it should be recycled in some way. On some of the shrub beds the leaves can be left where they fall forming a natural mulch to slowly break down and return their goodness to the soil as would happen in nature. Those that I have to lift I place in a heap to break down to form leaf mould, eventually decaying to form a “leaf soil”.



While it is easier to lift dry leaves it does help them break down better if they are wet when placed in a heap.



After six months on the leaf heap the leaves have broken down enough to be riddled and added to the potting mix this box however shows one year old leaf mould.



If left on the heap for longer the leaves gradually disintegrate forming a leaf soil: these are two year old leaves that I am spreading as a mulch on one of the bulb beds.



I have tidied and mulched this early flowering bulb bed with some of the two year old "leaf soil".



Other beds are awaiting a similar process as the weather and time permits, including this bed.



The bulb bed.



The rock garden bed.



You may remember I showed my new extendable pole saw and lopper a few weeks ago; well, I finally got round to doing a bit more work with the lopper attachment on this *Betula utilis* and then shredding the pile of trimmings.



The shredder quickly turns a large pile of bulky branches into a compact mass of chippings and once more I will use these as a top dressing for some of the beds.



Shredded prunings.



As I walk around the garden I notice some of the dried Erythronium seed stems rising up through the evergreen carpet of Pyrola leaves.



With the back light I can see that even after four months or more of opening a quantity of seed still remains in some of the capsules.

Erythronium seed

I step in to give a helping hand by scattering these remaining seeds around the area where I cut back some shrubs to open up the ground planting area. I note that this seed looks plump and hydrated unlike artificially stored seed which by this time would be wrinkled and needing soaked before being sown.



It is not just me that is interested in the seeds from the garden; this thrush has seen off a black bird taking over this *Sorbus hupehensis* as its food source. I took this picture with my new compact camera on 40X zoom, hand held, through the kitchen window and in poor light conditions.....