



BULB LOG 40.....2nd October 2019

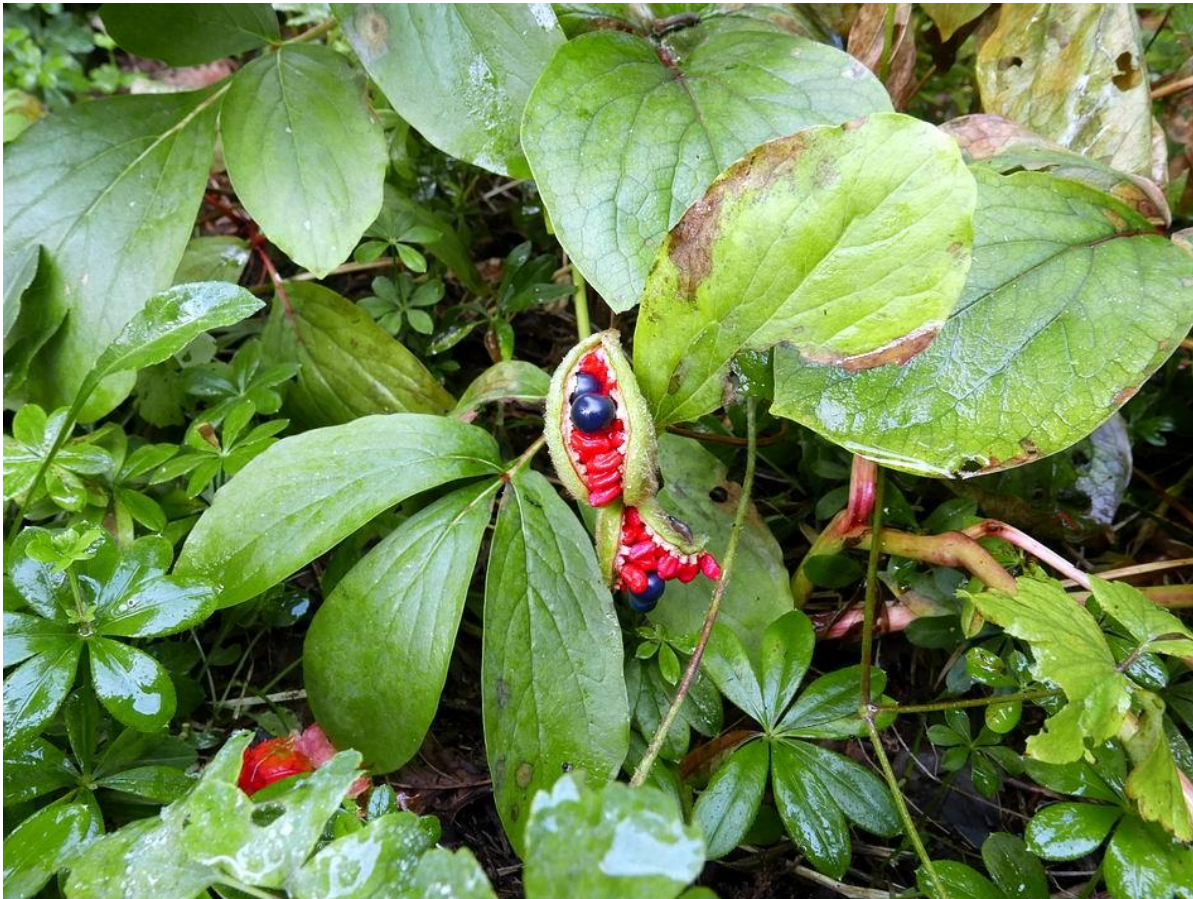


Papaver rupifragum and *Mutisia spinosa*



Phygelius capensis

Walking round the garden you cannot miss the feeling in the cooler, moister, autumnal air that a change is happening as the plants prepare in their own different ways for the approaching winter months. On the cover are *Papaver rupifragum* and *Mutisia spinose*, both of which have been flowering continuously for months now, since the first flowers opened in the spring and they continue to add highlights with their bright colours of orange and pink.



Some plants such as *Phygelius capensis*, shown above, encouraged by the ample moisture that is in the soil will deliver a second out-of-season display of flowers while the seed pods of peonies split open revealing the striking contrasting colours between the dark purple seeds that were fruitfully fertilised and those bright scarlet ones which for whatever reasons were not successful.

Peony seeds



I love watching the changing colours of the leaves on many plants as they slowly decay, such as these Jeffersonia and Roscoea. I want to enjoy this seasonal process as the roots gradually withdraw their support from the above-ground growth and I never rush into tidying up the colourful mess of autumn.

At the same time as the herbaceous plants are retreating for a winter underground, other plants like the autumn flowering bulbs, take advantage of the late sunshine and flying insects by sending up their flowering display. Colchicum and Crocus flowers rising through the yellowing Roscoea leaves and brown Dactylorhiza stems.





Sternbergia sicula

A significant amount of leaf growth has appeared in the sand beds since I applied the first storm at the beginning of September with some bulbs, such as *Sternbergia sicula* and *Strumaria karooica* also producing flowers.



Strumaria karooica



Bulb house

The beginning of October is the time that I routinely apply a second 'storm' - getting the hose pipe out to give all the sand beds and pots of bulbs another complete soaking.



In addition to the two main autumn storms I am constantly checking the pots to make sure they are not drying out in the milder sunny conditions. It is important that the pots are not allowed to dry out completely, especially those with substantial leaf growth although all bulbs will now have roots which require constant moisture.



The process of the second storm is the same as the first going round flooding every pot and letting it drain then repeating the process.



From now and through the winter I will water the pots in proportion to the amount of leaf growth. It is obvious that this growth of leaves needs water to fuel the process and letting them get too dry at this important stage of growth can lead to the bulbs breaking down so when you replot next year instead of finding nice sized bulbs you find multiple small ones.



Exactly what stimulates the growth in bulbs, corms and tubers has fascinated me ever since I started to grow them – one thing I do know is the trigger is not the presence of water alone which is evident in this bag of **Tropaeolum tricolorum tubers**.

These were surplus tubers that I kept in a paper bag in a dry cool potting shed and it was my intention to give them out at some of my talks for people to take away and try out for themselves.

This past week I went to packet them up individually only to find the mass of entwined growth rising out of the bag towards me.

As packeting was now no longer feasible the only thing I could do was to tear open the bag, drop them into a pot and grow them on for another year.



Tropaeolum azureum seed germinating.

Provided they were sown by the end of August/ early September bulb seeds will start to germinate at the same time as the mature bulbs are starting into growth, as is illustrated by this pot of Tropaeolum azureum seed germinating. The seed was sown in mid-August and the pot was placed outside to take the weather – I have found this to be the most reliable way to get this sometimes fugitive species to germinate and I will leave it outside for a few more weeks in the hope that more will germinate.



Crocus seed sown deep.

The Crocus seeds are among those that I sow deeply with great success – sowing deeply means that the young corms do not have to make their own way down, allowing them to grow better, especially in the first and second year.



Once they are all sown I top the pots up with the mix, give them a good watering and leave them outside to take the weather – as they germinate through the winter and spring I may move them under the protection of glass. It is a bit later than I would prefer to sow them (August) and I may have missed the optimum time window so some of the autumn flowering species may not germinate until next autumn – the spring ones should germinate fine.



In the garden there are many Crocus coming into flower such as *Crocus nudiflorus*, shown in the following pictures, where the typical purple form is now catching up with its white variation which puts in an earlier appearance.

Crocus nudiflorus

I am very attracted to seeing the plants growing through the pine needle mulch which here is applied naturally as they drop from the small *Pinus mugo*.

In addition to setting seed *Crocus nudiflorus* also spreads by stolons and that is how one has managed to make its way down to flower between the rocks.



Under this pine and on the rock face is where I have also established a colony of *(Pseudo)Trillium rivale*.



Crocus nudiflorus



Crocus banaticus is superficially similar in appearance/ colour to *Crocus nudiflorus* but very different when it is mild enough for the flowers to open, revealing the short inner three segments.



Crocus banaticus



Crocus banaticus is growing here in the new bed beside the pond. The pine needles which I mulched this bed with previously are slowly breaking down so I have been adding more from this year's drop.



I like the fresh pine needle mulch; it gives both a very natural looking mulch plus to my eye the red /brown gives a pleasing colour contrast with the crocus flowers.



Another typical autumnal scene showing the colourful chaos that autumn bring to the garden – note the crocus and colchicum flowers appearing through the yellowing foliage.



I will round off this week with two images taken one day apart of Colchicum flowers and a fungi.



I am going on Friday to Uppsala where I am one of the speakers at the Upplandskretsen Sällskapet Trädgårdsamatörerna weekend conference, I look forward to meeting some of you there and at the The Linnaean Gardens of Uppsala...