



SRGC -----

Bulb Log Diary

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*Ramonda nathaliae*



## **Ramonda nathaliae**



One of the very first rock garden plants I grew from seed was *Ramonda myconi*; we had seen a plant at an SRGC show and found seed in a catalogue so I ordered a packet. What I did not know then was how fine the seed was, it was tiny dust like and had to be handled carefully, sown near the surface and kept constantly moist until it germinated. Once it germinated I had to prevent it being smothered by the mosses that also wanted to grow in this environment. It was quite a challenge that taught that to be successful you need to observe and react quickly to anything that may be detrimental to the

wellbeing of our plants and most especially with young vulnerable seedlings. However despite all the challenges we brought those seedlings to maturity and are still growing direct descendants of those very plants decades later. That initiation stood us in good stead to try any seeds and indeed some years later we got seed of *Ramonda nathaliae* from the late, great, Jim Archibald and these are some of those plants kept going by successive seed generations and from cuttings and divisions.

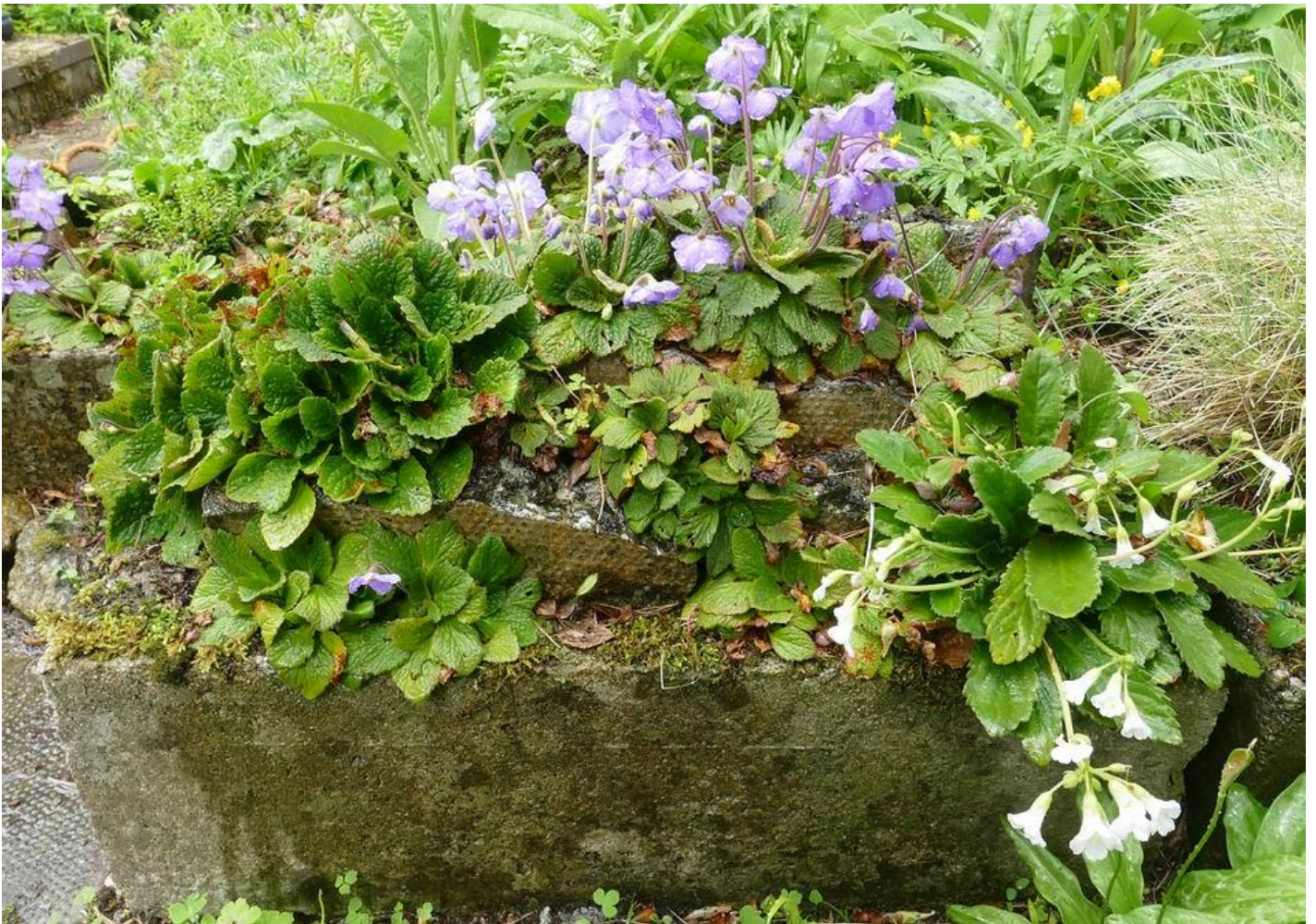


We have a growing colony of *Ramonda* growing in and around the new bed beside the pond, some have been growing for many years in the troughs that form part of the edges of this bed and I have continued the planting so they appear to spill out from the trough into the crevice section imitating a natural colony.





In our garden Ramonda thrive in a crevice type planting - in this well established trough the crevices are formed by vertically stacked broken concrete paving slabs.



The slightly larger, crinkly and more upright growing leaves on the left hand side are *Ramonda myconi*, the flatter rosettes are *Ramonda nathaliae*, which also flowers earlier than *myconi*, a white form of *Haberlia rhodopensis* is growing in the right hand corner. Every year the rosettes of all these plants increase until such time as the competition for moisture becomes too great and the plants start to suffer. I can see that the plant of *Ramonda nathaliae*, almost in the centre, is not flowering and also looking a bit yellow in the leaf sure signs that it is not happy so it is time to divide the plant.





I carefully eased the **Ramonda nathaliae** plant out of the crevice and divided it into single rosettes, if you are careful you can nearly always have some roots on each division. The plants form their own humus from the old leaves which helps retain moisture in times of drought as well as providing a good medium for the roots of the new side rosettes to grow into.



You can also propagate these plants from leaf cuttings as these scanned slides from my archive show. Although you can slice leaves up to form multiple plants I find it easier to remove a leaf, it does not have to be a perfect leaf as you can see chewed and damaged leaves work just as well. Like any cutting place the leaf base into a sandy cutting mixture and keep it constantly moist and you will find that the leaf will first form roots then at least one bud will form which will grow to a new plant. This can be done at almost any time of the year but I get the best results either now, when the plants are in full growth or in the early autumn as the plants recover from any summer dryness.



I ended up with enough divisions to replant the largest back into the original spot in the centre of this trough, three into a trough on the other corner of this bed, below, as well as some around the gravel edges.



Remember my job is not finished yet I have to water the divisions in well then ensure that they do not dry out in the summer until a self-supporting root system establishes.

With conservation and import regulations making it increasingly difficult to introduce new seed from the wild it is ever more important that we preserve and maintain the plants we have in our gardens both by division, cuttings and most critically by seed to maintain as wide a genetic base as possible.





To know when the best time is to lift plants you need to understand their growth cycle. With many plants it is best to divide them just as they are coming into active growth; that is when they have the best chance to recover from the interruption and any damage. Most bulbous plants are best handled when they are in summer rest. Sometimes however the

best time to lift plants is when it suits the gardener. This form of *Colchicum agrippinum* has grown so well in the rock garden bed that the leaves are now completely dominating a section. For a few years I have had the intention to lift them— but when is the best time? For the colchicum it would be best to lift them in the summer when the leaves die back but then there are many other plants that would be in growth and as the autumn comes in the colchicum would start to flower then be back in root again.

This is one of the instances when the best time to do a job is when it is best for the gardener, when he has the time and he remembers - so I got stuck in.

One advantage of lifting them just now was that I could use the growth to locate the bulbs.







Lifting a line of rocks made getting down to the colchicum bulbs easier and some of them were well over 30 cms down.

As I dug I carefully checked for other bulbs, most of which were nearer the surface, and laid them aside covered with moist newspaper to prevent them drying out until they were replanted.



As the colchicum bulbs have increased vegetatively they were in clusters, many tucked in under the rocks.





It is interesting to note that while I damaged some of the colchicum bulbs I am sure that I could have replanted the majority without much of a check to their growth. I have not yet worked out what to do with all the bulbs so for now they are being stored on a metal tray in shade and being kept moist this will cause the bulbs to be smaller than they would have been but they will survive.



The line of rocks is back in place all the other plants and bulbs are replaced and watered in so now later in the season I can plant some of the other plants such as *Erythronium elegans* and *sibiricum* that I have been growing on from seed and that will be more in scale for the rest of the plant community in this bed.





Establishing plant communities is a large part of our garden philosophy – to work well the plants must be balanced supporting one another and not in conflict. With their leaves and flowers at the top of a long stem Trilliums are ideal companions to grow through various forms and species of Dicentra.



*Trillium sulcatum*, *flexipes*, and *erectum* hybridise freely in the garden while the resulting plants have relatively small flowers they have an interesting range of colours and they come into flower later than many of the others.





**Trillium sulcatum hybrid**



**Trillium sulcatum hybrid**





**Trillium sulcatum hybrid**







Flowering in the front garden, which is on the north side of the house, is always that bit later than the south facing back garden so we can enjoy a longer flowering season.



**Trillium  
grandiflorum**





We have a few ***Erythronium revolutum*** hybrids, above and below, that flower later than the others and plants that could prolong the erythronium flowering season makes them potential candidates to be increased.







The picture above shows the flower of the previous **Erythronium revolutum hybrid** which has a deep coloured zonal marking. It is not dissimilar in looks to many of the other hybrids we grow but if the late flowering habit is consistent that gives it great potential.



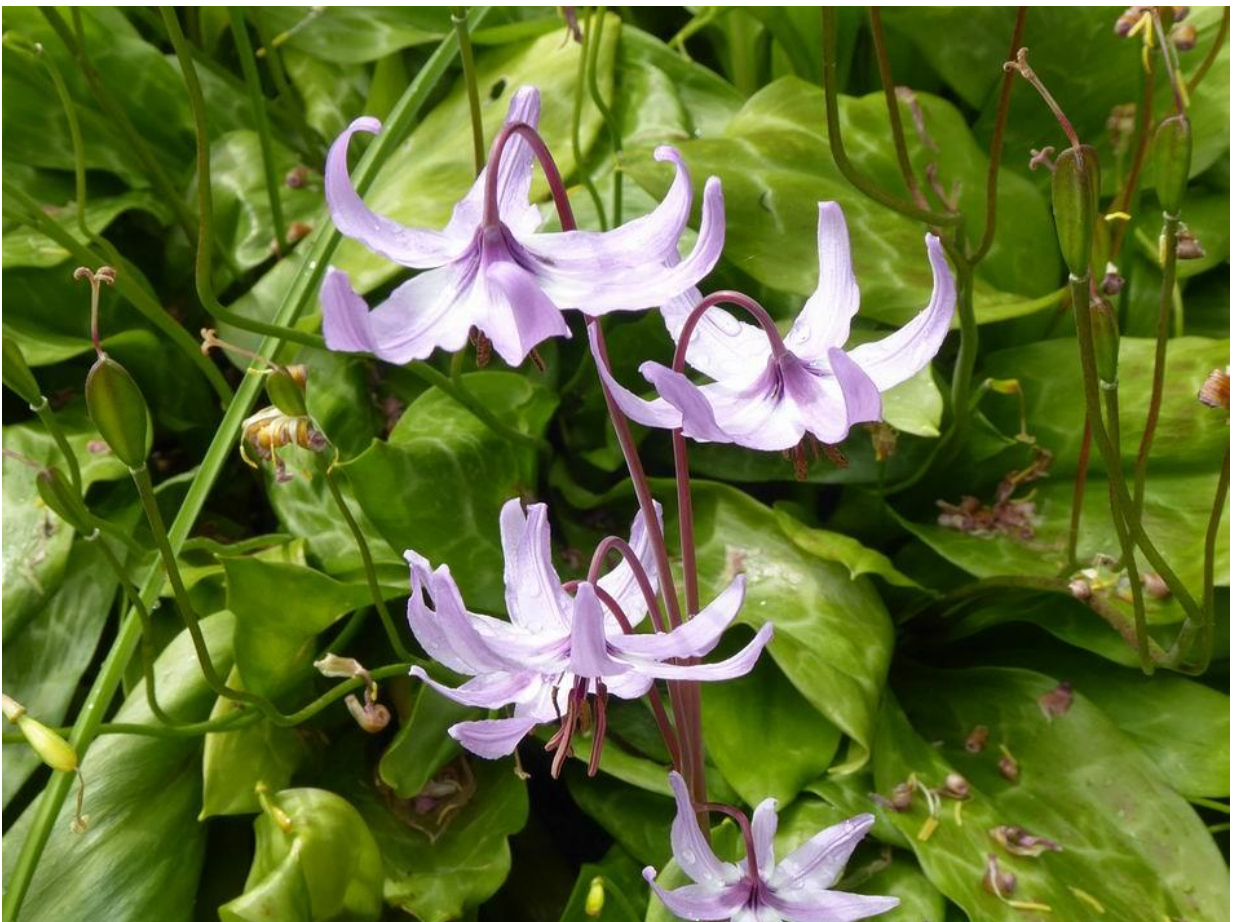
#### **Erythronium oregonum (left)**

Another form of *Erythronium oregonum* is among the first of the Western North American species to flower in our garden and this form is always the last, showing that even within a species there can be a wide range of variability in looks and flowering times.





This form of **Erythronium oregonum** is always the last to flower.



One of the other species that produces early flowers in the garden is **Erythronium hendersonii** – and here we have a late flowering form.





**Erythronium hendersonii**

The first of our *Erythronium hendersonii* can flower around the end of February the last is now in flower.





### ***Cymbalaria muralis***

I have had a love of and interest in wild flowers since I was a boy and that led me into gardening.

*Cymbalaria muralis* is a plant native to Mediterranean Europe that has become widely naturalised and commonly seen growing on walls.

This is a real crevice plant that not only survives but thrives in the toughest of environments.



When you look carefully it has the most beautiful flowers.







Molly looks carefully at a colony of *Cymbalaria muralis* growing at the base of the wall where in a less extreme environment it adopts a more luxurious growth pattern.

This is a great plant that can teach us so much about the effect the habitat can have on the plants.



### ***Cymbalaria muralis***

Growing in the crack between the pavement and the base of the wall these plants will have roots going into the ground so have more access to water and nutrients, also this sight is less exposed to the drying effect of sunshine.





Some of you may have already spotted that the Ramonda pictured on the front page is growing through a carpet of *Cymbalaria muralis* which makes an excellent low growing carpet that also produces a long succession of flowers while in the same plant growing in the tougher environment of the through, below, stays for the moment compact. Spot the Welsh poppy and the dandelion, too!







***Cymbalaria muralis***

This adaptable plant can be grown as a trough plant, in a crevice or as a ground covering carpet through which other plants can happily grow.....