



SRGC

Bulb Log Diary

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‘Shelter from the Storm’



The birch tree in next door's garden is looking magnificent in its autumn glory in the calm before another storm, this one called Aiden, brought heavy rain and strong winds for two days. Just before the storm arrived I noticed the paths were covered in what looked like confetti. I watched as the birds pecked at the 'confetti' and on the closer inspection I realised this was a mass shedding of birch seeds from the neighbours' and our own birch trees.

As expected the winds brought most of the leaves down except for a scattering of the most stubborn which cling to the trees, not quite ready to be separated. The cover image reflects the changing of the season as the main flowering interest switches from the open garden represented by the birch tree to the bulbs getting '[Shelter From the Storm](#)' in the bulb houses where the first of this season's Narcissus flowers joins in with the many Crocus blooms.



The Crocus flowers will gradually get fewer as we head into winter but many more species are waiting in the sand to start flowering as we come out of winter and into spring.



Crocus pallasii* 'Homeri' and *Crocus ligusticus



Crocus longiflorus

Scilla lingulata

It is not just the crocus that are flowering in the sand beds, there are a number of clumps of *Scilla lingulata* covered in their pale blue flowers.

The single bulbs I planted have grown well in the sand increasing to form clumps like this in around three years. It has been interesting to observe how the wide range of bulbs I planted in the sand beds have performed.



As a general rule most of the Crocus I planted have settled into the sand flowering well and increasing by the year.



***Crocus mathewii* 'Dream Dancer'**



Crocus longiflorus* and *Crocus laevigatus



I take great pleasure from the random plantings of the sand beds which are much more like a garden and are in sharp contrast to the more formal way of growing the bulbs in pots each with its own group of a single species or form.



The Sternbergia are growing and flowering much better in the sand than they did in pots. This Sternbergia sicula is flowering some weeks after the others.



There are no labels in the sand beds so I have to be able to identify the plants - I can mostly do with the crocus sometimes with a bit of research mostly referring to Janis Ruksans's excellent book [The World of Crocuses](#).



The hoop petticoat Narcissus are very different with even some of the species being difficult to positively identify. With so many of our plants being hybrids raised from our own seeds identifying them becomes an impossible task that defies formal classification. This is a lovely seedling whose pure white flowers and floral parts would suggest it has *Narcissus albidus* in its heritage but then not all authorities accept *Narcissus albidus* as a valid name so I just enjoy their charm and think of the seedlings as hybrid swarms.



Crocus ochroleucus albus with some **Crocus longiflorus** behind.



I noticed some unusual markings on these *Crocus longiflorus* flowers which on closer inspection also showed a slight distortion of the floral segments this leads me to think that these are virussed. Viruses are ever present in our world as we are all too aware and they are also widespread in many plants. I think there may be more viruses in plants than we realise – I remember watching a documentary where a virologist dipped a pint glass into the ocean I cannot remember the exact words but the message was there were a huge number of viruses within that pint glass. That got me thinking that there could also be a large number of viruses in plants many of which do the plant no obvious harm. I have often seen virussed plants for sale; sometimes the effect of the virus is the feature of the cultivar, such as [Tulip breaking virus](#) which was at the heart of the tulip mania in 17th century Holland. Many cultivars can grow strongly despite showing the symptoms of a virus but other plants often species can succumb within a few years of the symptoms appearing.



Many Crocus flowers have dark streaks and markings naturally but the irregular nature of the dark streaks and blotches on these **Crocus longiflorus** flowers along with the slight wrinkling of the petals makes me believe they are virused.



Compare these healthy **Crocus longiflorus** flowers with the virused ones in the previous picture.



Virused *Crocus longiflorus*

There were just a few of the suspicious *Crocus longiflorus* plants in the sand beds so I lifted them to minimise the chance of the virus spreading to the healthy ones. I would normally destroy the infected corms but I have planted these in a pot which I will grow in isolation because I want to see if the leaves show any unusual streaks or distortions which are also symptoms of a virus. Viruses are ever present and many robust plants and cultivars may be living perfectly well with them but if like us you want to grow a wide range of species then you need to be cautious, ruthlessly getting rid of any plants that show virus symptoms.



The following sequence of pictures show some of the Crocuses growing in the sand beds.



***Crocus goulimyii* 'Sofia Agia'**



The natural markings on **Crocus goulimyii 'Sofia Agia'** can look similar to virus symptoms but these I am sure are perfectly healthy.



Crocus goulimyii 'Sofia Agia'



Crocus growing in sand bed.





Crocus longiflorus flowers are still attractive even as they are withering having served their function.



Galanthus peshmenii and **Galanthus reginae-olgae**

Some Snowdrops are also adapting to growing well in the sand beds especially the autumn flowering ones which we struggle to grow in the open garden - I think this is Galanthus peshmenii and Galanthus reginae-olgae.



We have one bulb house where we are still growing all the bulbs in pots such as this **Galanthus reginae-olgae**.



This was the view before the storm now many of the leaves are lying on the ground and I have started the clear up which will continue for some weeks as more of our trees shut down for the winter.....