



BULB LOG 41 8th October 2008

I have decided to spend to do part two of the troughs this week and that is landscaping them.



Trough one

The first thing I always state when taking workshops on landscaping your trough is to make it look interesting before you put any plants into it and the it will look good with plants as well. You can see from this trough that I like to achieve some degree of height with my rock work. How often have you heard people say that they wish their garden was not flat – well when you are creating your trough landscape you are in charge. I hate to see a trough not filled to the rim and left flat because inevitably the compost will sink so even after topdressing with gravel you end up with several centimetres of the inside edge showing.



Workshop troughs

I will start by showing you two troughs I landscaped at a recent workshop to demonstrate my methods of creating both an interesting landscape and also to provide a good planting depth in what was originally a shallow trough.



Creating a landscape

Another bit of advice I always give is to be bold and start with at least one large rock. In this case the rock is quite tall so I do not need to make a pile of compost I just fill the trough to a bit below the edge and bed the rock in. If I was using smaller rocks I would make a pile of compost as you will see below. The landscape that you create will depend on the type and shape of the stone you have available and in this case after placing my largest rock I now start to make a series of crevices leading up to a face.



Build up the height

Continue to build up the height using the stones and at this stage I would now start to add more compost so it can get well worked in between the stones. The compost I favour for these crevice type plantings is two parts grit one part leafmould and two parts loam in the base and then as I create the extra height I use a very gritty sand just mixed with a small amount of bone meal to add some nutrient. When I build these up at home I wash the sand down the cracks with water as I go but this was not possible at the workshop.



Shallow trough

Now switching to an even shallower trough I am going to use old roofing slates to create my landscape and height - here I am just using sharp sand and bone meal. Having filled the trough with the sand I start standing some of the bigger bits of slate at an angle across the trough leaving gaps of about one centimetre between them.



Angle some slates

Then I set some smaller pieces at an angle to these to help support them adding more sand as I go.



Adding sand as you go

Continue working around your trough adding more slate and washing sand in as you go until you are pleased with the effect. When you are watering the sand in watch how the water flows and if it is running off too quickly in parts I add some extra small bits of slate to prevent this.



Slate Trough.

Once I am happy with the landscape I can add some plants. The plants I use are always very small to start with perhaps just cuttings which depending on the time of year can root very quickly into the sand in the crevices.



One stone

It is not necessary to have masses of stone to landscape smaller troughs like these and this one lump of sandstone when broken up with a hammer and chisel produces enough to landscape at least two or three troughs.



Boulder trough

Even if you can just get small boulder shaped rocks you can still create very nice landscapes – in fact it is a good idea if you have a number of troughs not to landscape them in the same way. When I use rounded stones I like to make a big pile of the loam based mixture in the trough and place my biggest stone on it.

Around the trough

Another consideration when landscaping your trough is how it will be placed. If it is going to be against a wall then the back will not be seen so you take this into account when placing your first stones. If it is to be viewed from all sides then you need to make sure that there is all around interest and planting spaces.



New Zealand trough

Here is another example of a landscaped trough ready to be planted with New Zealand alpine plants, I like to theme my troughs.



Granite trough

This is a real stone trough which I made from an old granite paving slab. It has only a shallow cavity but I have provided the plants with extra depth by building up with the rocks. This one has been replanted several times over the last fifteen years or so but always with sedums and sempervivums which are stuck in as cuttings.



Saxifraga trough

Another trough landscaped with red sandstone and planted with saxifrage cuttings about a month ago and they have all rooted and are now showing signs of growth. I will add additional pictures of our troughs to the forum in the coming weeks and I will cover more about planting them up now they are landscaped in a future bulb log but now it seems appropriate to review an new book on saxifrage that I have just received.