



### **Iris histrioides clumps**

Whenever the weather has been suitable I have been outside collecting up the leaves – it is a great job because it lets you see what is going on in the garden as winter hopefully draws to a close. Why is it that some weeds never seem to stop growing? I have found plenty that needed removing before they set seed.

Also I noticed that these *Iris histrioides* were now at the stage of getting too congested to display their flowers properly plus the one to the left is being overgrown by a dwarf *Rhododendron*.

The question “when is the best time to move and or split plants” is one of the most commonly asked. My answer is that there are generally two perfect times – first the perfect time for the plant that fits in with its annual growth cycle and will cause it the least harm and not check its growth. The second is the time that is perfect for the gardener – that is when you have time and when you remember. In this case I have chosen the second option because I remember thinking last spring that I should lift and split these *Iris* as soon as they go dormant but out of sight is out of mind and I forgot. Because we have a light soil that has a very high humus content it makes it easy for me to lift the clump with minimal damage to the delicate roots.





### **Iris histrioides split**

I can also carefully split the clump into eight separate parts again causing minimal damage to the roots. Some of the divisions contain two shoots as the bulbs prepare to split but because the bulbs have not finished growing I do not attempt to separate them.

No matter how careful I am, I will have broken a number of the root tips which is not ideal for the bulbs but their services to the bulb have not yet reached a peak. The roots will continue to grow as the shoot extends, the flowers open and most importantly when the leaves are growing – that is when they are most needed.



### **Iris histrioides replanted**

The other important rule is to replant them as quickly as you can and in this case the bulbs were not out of the ground more than five minutes. If you have heavy soil such as clay then it will not be so easy for you to lift and split plants like this without causing extensive damage to the roots.



### **Galanthus 'Snoopy'**

It has long been stated that the best time to lift and divide Galanthus is 'in the green' but if you investigate the evidence you will find that this is not the ideal time for the plants. Disturbing and damaging the roots when the plant needs them most cannot be the best thing to do to a plant. We can get away with it because being true bulbs they do not have to replace themselves completely every year – they just add extra layers to build up their perennial bulb. Such root damage at a critical period of the growth cycle will cause the plant a check in its growth – how often do we hear when receiving bulbs in the green that they may take a year or two to settle down and give their best performance – this is entirely due to the growth cycle being so rudely disturbed. The ideal time to split Galanthus bulbs, or any bulb, is when they are dormant. If you do it when the leaves are dying back and have turned yellow they will help guide you to where to dig to find the bulbs. The other important fact to understand is that Galanthus bulbs do not like being stored out of the ground for any length of time so they should be replanted back as quickly as possible. The myth that moving in the green is best has been perpetuated for years for a number of reasons, one of which is exactly the reason that I split the Iris above - it was the ideal time for me – not the plants.



### **Cyclamen coum**

Out of breath from the leaf lifting I took a breather by enjoying the moments of sunshine in the bulb houses where one of the few Cyclamen coum plants that I have in a pot is flowering well. Because of our weather the ones in the garden struggle to display their flowers in this manner but I continue to sow any seed I can get in the hope that I will eventually raise a corm that can hold its flowers up high in our garden.

## **Crocus michelsonii**

I could not resist taking another picture of the beautiful *Crocus michelsonii* and sharing it with you. This is one *Crocus* that seems to be enjoying our growing conditions and this is the best pot full that I can remember having. I do hope that the warmth from the occasional sunshine and my regular pollinating with a paint brush will provide me with a good quantity of seed this year. I cannot tell you how often I have achieved a good pot full of a bulb and been congratulating myself like this only to have a major setback – the bulbs have a way of always keeping me in my place.



## **Crocus 'Sun Spot'**

Last year was the first time we had *Crocus 'Sun Spot'* and I am very pleased with the rate of increase it has shown.

It is a fairly recently named selection of *Crocus chrysanthus* which has a very dramatic shiny black stigma making it very attractive indeed.

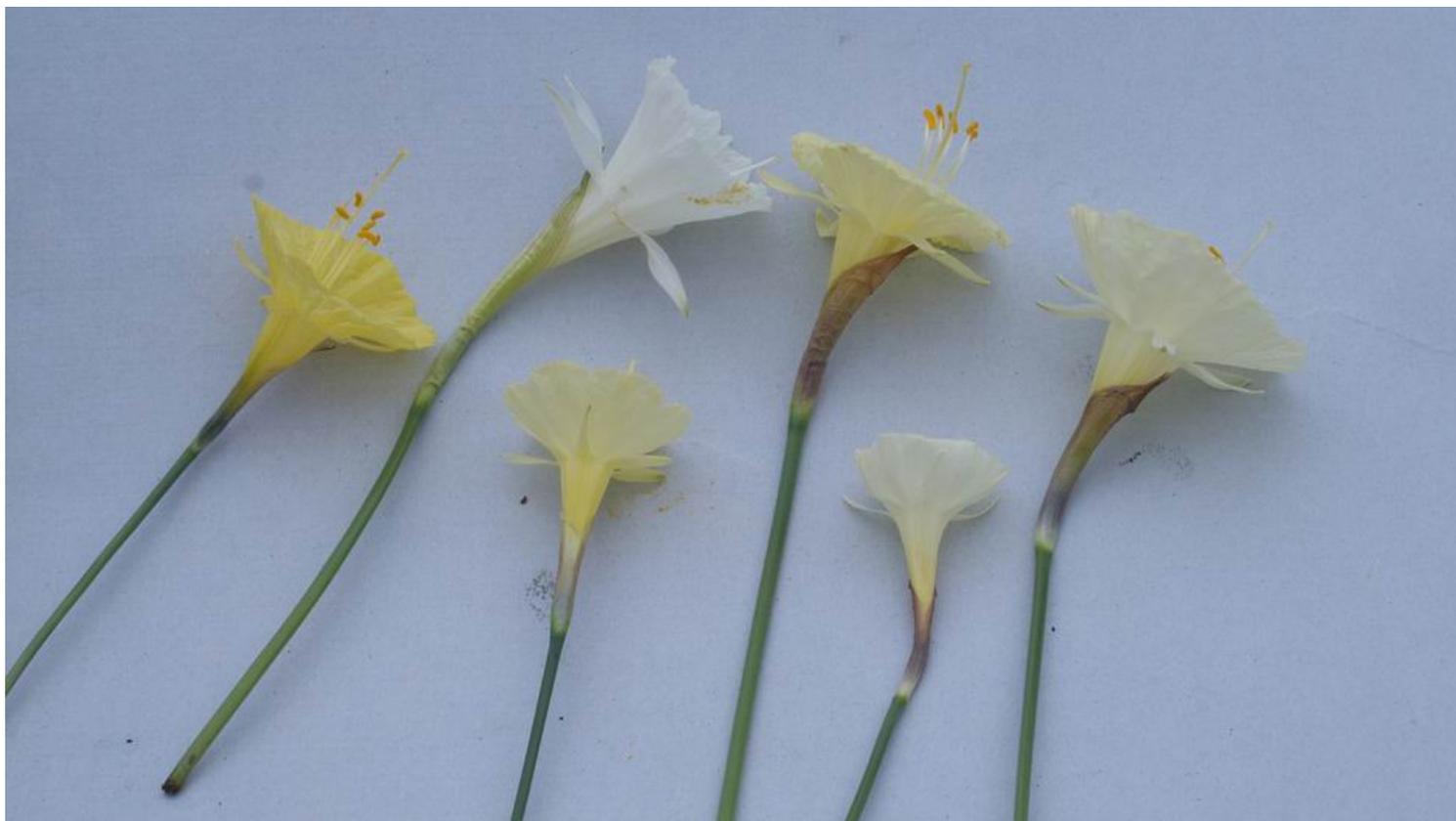
I do not buy bulbs very often; I much prefer to raise them from seed but this was one of those occasions when I could not resist the beauty and Maggi parted with some money!

Unfortunately these flowers have been above ground for so long waiting for some warmth from the sun that they are now starting to go past their best without ever having opened fully this year.



**Crocus biflorus ssp alexandrii**

The variation you should see in these *Crocus biflorus ssp alexandrii* shows why I do like to grow my bulbs from seed.



**Narcissus flowers**

I amused myself when it was too wet to work outside by taking photographs of some of the *Narcissus* that are in flower just now. I do not like to lift the pots out of the plunge to photograph them because in most cases their roots will have escaped into the sand and would be damaged if I were to move them so I simply picked a flower.



**Narcissus romieuxii 'Atlas Gold'**

Starting from the left is one of the deepest yellow selections of *Narcissus romieuxii* well named 'Atlas Gold'. Unfortunately no matter what I try I have never managed to capture a picture that shows the yellow that I see with my eyes.



**Narcissus albidus occidentalis**

Although I like them all this form of *Narcissus albidus occidentalis* is one of my all time favourites – and it has a fabulous strong sweet scent.



**Narcissus romieuxii ssp tananicus**

**Narcissus romieuxii ‘Joy Bishop’**

There are a number of forms of *Narcissus romieuxii* that display a lobed corona, like the one the one on the left above, which I received many years ago as *Narcissus* ‘Joy Bishop’ and if you raise them from seed you get a large proportion of offspring with varying degrees of lobing of the corona. I am not sure that it is possible to determine the original form that received that cultivar name – perhaps it should become a group. On the right is another form of *Narcissus romieuxii* that I received as ssp *tananicus* but I am not convinced that is the proper name for it. It is a distinct form as the flowers look upwards with the style and stigma protruding from the corona which is rolled outwards at the mouth.



**Un-named seedling**

This is a new nameless seedling that had self sown in a pot of *Crocus* – I think it is very beautiful.



### **Narcissus 'Craigton Clumper'**

The final one is Narcissus 'Craigton Clumper' a selection I made and named a few years ago.



### **Iris nicolai**

I used to grow a lot of Iris but gave them up about 16 years ago when I had to rationalise what we grew because I did not have enough room under glass to grow everything we would like.

The reason I picked on the Iris was because they flowers last for such a short time and they were very susceptible to virus.

Over the years I have been given small bulbs or seeds by a number of friends so a few, like this Iris nicolai, have crept back into the bulb house.

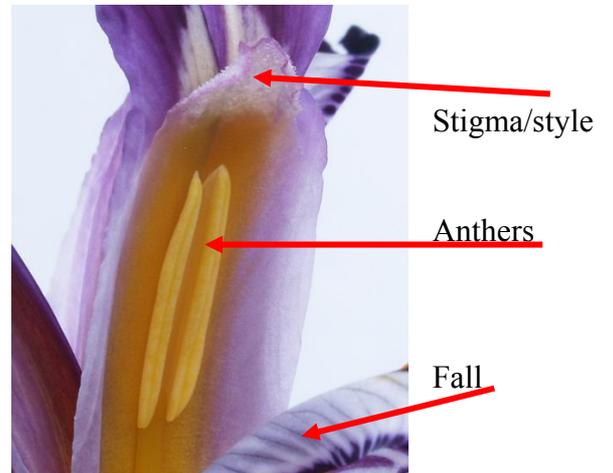


### **Iris nicolai**

Who could resist such beauty especially this early in the year?

In keeping with my own advice I will fertilise the flower and attempt to get some seed to set but first I need to know where the stigma is.

The anthers are plain to see when you prise the petals apart but you have to look carefully to see the stigma is actually the end part of what appears to be a petal that cups the anthers and is in fact the style.





### ***Eranthis pinnatifida***

At long last I am starting to build up the number of *Eranthis pinnatifida* tubers some by division but mostly by seed which I sowed back in the same pot with the parents. Last year I had a reasonable crop of seed so I sowed them in a separate pot which I showed germinating in bulb log 4 this year. If you look carefully you will see that a number of the stems have a second flower appearing - I have not observed that before. It could be because I repotted them for the first time in two years last summer so they are enjoying the additional nutrient. I love the way the flowers appear to open long before their petals have formed properly and as time goes on the gradually get larger until they reach their true stature

