



BULB LOG 18.....4th May 2011



Garden view



Above is the garden viewed across the trough area that many recent visitors will be familiar with. The nearest raised bed also contains one of the plants that I featured in my talk at the Conference in Nottingham. It may have surprised a number of people but regular readers of the bulb log will know that I have grown this dandelion in this bed for around 25 years. It is a magnificent plant with attractive foliage, it covers itself with a succession of flowers in the spring - I was removing around 30 to 40 dead flowers each day for over a week when it was in peak flower. It seeds around if you let it, you can eat the leaves and flowers in salads and roast the root to make a coffee

type drink – what more could you ask of a plant? And just in case you were thinking that it is not a ‘rock garden plant’ take a look at the pictures below.



Taraxacum officinale

Cliff dweller – for sure these plants can grow anywhere and are tolerant of salt spray both at the seaside and the road sides where they form great sheets of yellow to cheer our way as we go travelling at this time of year.



If you are wondering what is the reason that I am growing a dandelion; well it is to remind me not to become a plant snob only wanting to grow the rare and difficult plants. All plants have their value and my dandelion has become the standard against which I can measure other plants. Some of you will call it a weed – well a weed can be described as a plant in the wrong place – I call it a wild flower.



Tropaeolum tricolorum and T. azureum

If a weed is a plant that seeds around in the wrong place then here are two - *Tropaeolum tricolorum* and *T. azureum* both are self seeding around in my sand plunge. Both are very welcome as is my dandelion as long as they do not interfere adversely with the other plants that I am trying to grow.



Bulb house

I have just heard it confirmed that we have had the hottest April since 1910 and that has been very reflected in the sudden retreat into dormancy of the bulbs under glass. I have never known the bulbs go back this early in Aberdeen, the heat wave that struck while we were away in Nottingham sent the temperature in the small glasshouses soaring.



Plunge

Early dormancy is not ideal as many bulbs would have just been at the stage of adding to the food reserve in the case of true bulbs or in the case of Crocus forming a new corm when they suddenly shut down. I have a strong suspicion that when I repot I will find many crocus will have aborted at the point where the new corm is around the same size and still sitting on top of the old corm. What should happen if the growth cycle is uninterrupted is that the food reserve of the old corm is passed fully on to the new corm giving a fat new corm sitting on the shrunken remnants of the old one. Below are two of the last bulbs to flower as the others go dormant, the little yellow *Nothoscordum ostenii* and *Allium yosemitense*.



Nothoscordum ostenii* and *Allium yosemitense



Muscari seed pods

I am delighted to see that I am getting some fat seedpods on the lovely Muscari sp. from Turkey. This is almost certainly down to my patient work with a paint brush over a number of days when they were in flower.



Eranthis pinnatifida seeds



I have also been pleased to collect a number of seeds on our pot of *Eranthis pinnatifida*. A common dilemma is when to sow seeds to get the best results? I always look at the seeds and imagine what conditions they would find when they are shed in nature allied with how that seed might be distributed. Looking at these *Eranthis* seeds they appear to resemble miniature corms rather than seeds that are intended to be stored so I have sown them immediately quite deep in a pot using a leafmould based compost which I will leave outside in an open frame.



Pine tree

The pine tree that I raised last autumn is springing into new growth just now with the new growth appearing like candles at the tip of every branch and twig.



Candle growth



Candle pruning

Learning from nature is easy if you keep your mind as well as your eyes open. As a youth I was fascinated by all the dwarf pine trees high on the hills of Scotland. Some were stunted because of the conditions they were growing in – some were growing out of a crack in a rock, others growing in a waterlogged peat bog but others that were growing in normal hillside were also dwarf and very compact in growth. Over the years I observed deer, rabbits and hare all eating the new tender young growths that appeared like candles and it was their foraging that caused the reduced growth of the pines. This pine tree is not a dwarf variety but a normal *Pinus montanum* which I have candle pruned at this time over the last 30 years.



Candle pruning

As soon as the candle growths start to elongate they are very tender and it is easy to snap them off by just bending them back with your fingers – I wear gloves because you get very sticky from the resinous sap. You can reduce the growths by as much or as little as you want and because you are not cutting any of the pine needles the pruning is invisible as the remaining needles extend unharmed. If you leave it too long - and that may be only one week later - the new growth starts to become woody and it does not break off so simply and may require cutting with secateurs which is not so easy or attractive.



Cardiocrinum giganteum

Many of you have shown a lot of interest in my time share plantings and how they work and look at different times so I will try and feature them more often as we move through the seasons. Sometimes it only takes a week for one group of plants to give way to another and this exceptionally hot spring has seen a very compressed flowering season. Many of the Erythroniums that in previous years would flower some weeks apart with only a short overlap have all come together this year giving us a bumper display but for a shorter period. The Corydalis solida foliage has now collapsed and many other bulbs are taking their turn.



Time share planting



Time share planting

Dicentra hybrids, between *D. eximia* and *D. formosa*, provide a lovely foliage foil for some of the larger *Fritillaria* such as *F. pallidiflora* and *meleagris* to rise through. I weed out the large coarser leaved dicentra forms leaving those with finely dissected often glaucous foliage which works well with *Dicentra cucularia*.



Time share planting

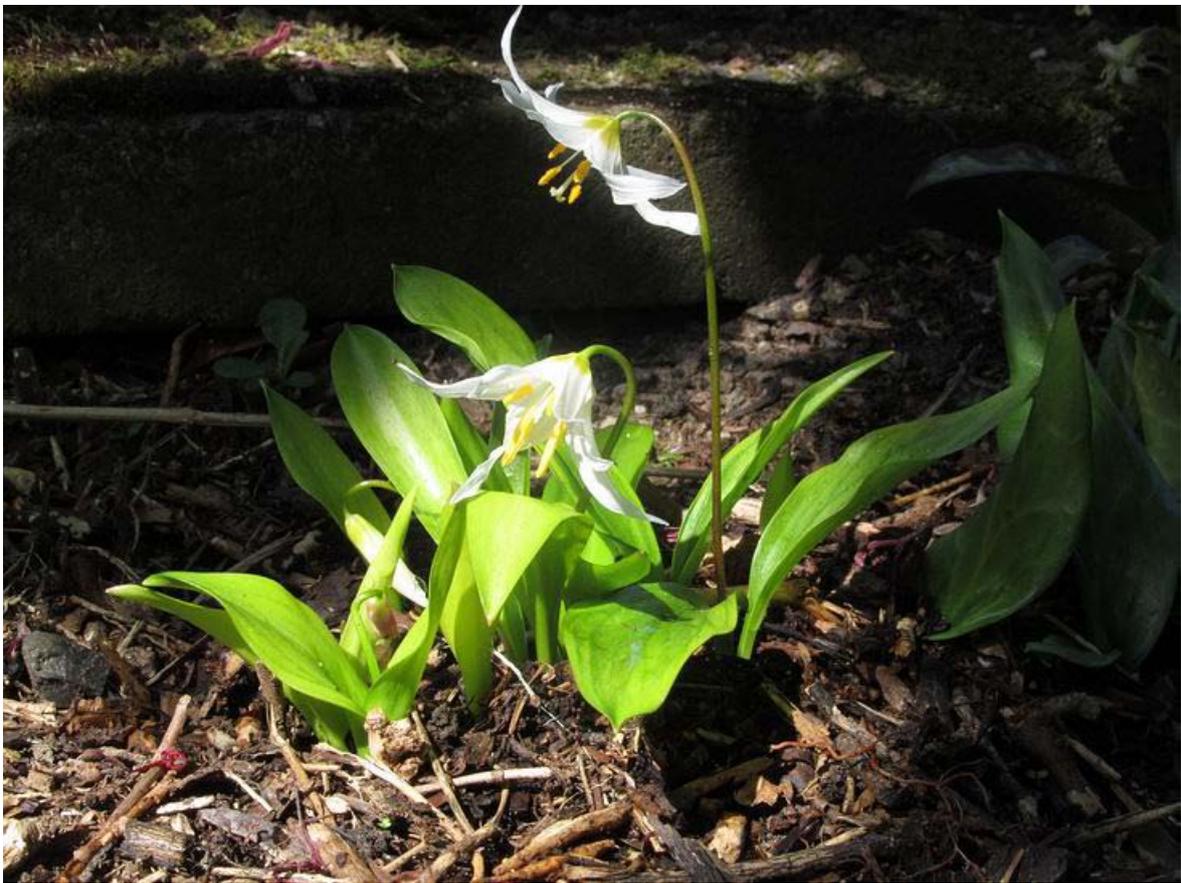


Time share planting



Erythronium montanum

Erythronium montanum is often described as difficult to grow but we now have it growing and flowering freely in several sites in our garden. I have tamed this beauty by raising from an initial introduction of wild collected seeds then subsequently collecting the garden seed. Each generation of garden seed produced a number of seedlings that were more adapted to our conditions and the ones you are seeing in the next few pictures are at least the third generation of garden seed.



Erythronium montanum

I have been interested to observe a number of flowers where the acuminate tips have stayed bound forming an open sided globe shaped flower that would protect the anthers and style but still allow pollinators in to fertilise the flowers. You can see how in certain weather conditions this could become a positive advantage over flowers that opened normally and so genetic selection could result in a population of predominately this type of flower – not dissimilar to *Lilium loophorum*.

I will finish off this week's Bulb Log with one more picture of an *Erythronium montanum* flower followed by one of *Erythronium helenae* showing the typical bent style and, unusually for this genus, also having a beautiful scent.



Erythronium montanum



Erythronium helenae