



BULB LOG 17.....24th April 2012



Bulbs in the front drive



Front Drive

It must be around twenty years ago that I realised one day while on my knees weeding the gravel strip between the slabs of the front drive that here I had an unused gravel bed. Since then I have scattered seeds of all kinds including bulbs which has resulted in a very pleasing, to me anyway, sight. Many a passerby may just think it is a weedy mess along with an endless number of passing tradesmen who seek an opportunity for some tarmac or lock block.

I will stick with the plants and I allow them to self seed often helping the distribution along the length by grabbing a ripe seed pod and scattering the seeds as I come in and out of the drive. I am often asked if we allow cars there. Yes for the most part the plants are all short enough to allow cars to pass without harm. The only time cars are banned is when the stems elongate as the seeds ripen.

Fritillaria, Erythronium, Narcissus, Muscari are among the ones in flower just now.



Bulb house

In the bulb houses many of the early flowering bulbs are now showing signs of preparing to go dormant. As soon as you see the leaves starting to yellow, usually from the tip down, it is time to reduce watering and many in plastic pots will not need any more water added this season. The danger to the bulb as it is entering the dormant stage is too much moisture in the compost which can cause wet rot. I water carefully only adding water to those late growing bulbs like the yellow **Northoscordum ostenii** you can see above.



On the left you can see a blast from the past in the days when we only grew alpines under glass. Bulbs then were only in a small outside frame- but gradually things evolved and the bulbs took over banishing the alpines to troughs and raised beds. Of course if we had time and space we would love to grow them all.

Bulb house

At the far end of the bulb house you can see the fans that used to run all the time to keep air moving over the cushion plants when this simple structure was our 'alpine house'.



Tropaeolum azureum and tricolor

How delighted we were in the 1980's when we first raised Tropaeolum azureum from John Watson's seed growing it carefully in a pot – we even won a Forrest Medal with it. Now it, like its more accommodating relative T. tricolor, seeds around in the shallow sand plunge making a lovely colourful tangle of growth over the old electrics and through the yellowing leaves of the bulbs as they go dormant. Difficulty in growing certain plants is often a perceived conception rather than a fact.

Allium derderianum

I still only have a single bulb of the beautiful dwarf Allium derderianum raised from Vojtech Holubec seed.

This year it is more robust than it has ever been so I attend it every day carefully transferring pollen to the stigma with my paint brush in the hope that it is self compatible and mature enough to seed some set.





Gravel area

Seed set is not always a problem as you can see above the gravel area in front of a raised bed is now almost completely taken over by *Corydalis* hybrids, mostly *Corydalis* 'Craigton Blue' and its seedlings.



Round the side of the same bed, *Meconopsis*, *Trillium* and *Erythronium* are among those that are self seeding in numbers. Luckily we have paving slabs to help us step through this wonderful self generating seed bed.



Trillium grandiflorum and Erythronium 'Craigton Cover Girl'

The plants above are in a bed adjacent to the paved and gravel pathway and are the parents of many of the self sown seedlings. It is easy to lift and move the plants from this gravel areas if they become too much of an obstruction. We have stopped bothering to sow Meconopsis in pots because we get a constant supply from the gravel area and they transfer well just now, as they are coming into growth.



Erythronium revolutum

This Erythronium revolutum with four flowers to the stem has self seeded into the path directly below a similar plant growing in the raised bed.

It appears that this habit of Erythronium revolutum producing multiple flowers to a stem is partly genetic but also requires good growing conditions for the plant to respond in this way.



This **Trillium ovatum** has self seeded right under a Ledum (now Rhododendron) bush: this is just the sort of conditions that I saw them growing under in the wilds of Oregon a few years ago.



Erythronium americanum flowers are waiting for the rain to go and some sunshine to warm us up before they open their flowers. Their flowers remain tightly closed while those of E. 'White Beauty', behind, like a number of species, partially open their flowers at lower temperatures to allow insects in to pollinate.



Cassiope wardii x fastigiata

Last year in [bulb log 3011](#) I showed how I cropped this plant which had grown quite tall and straggly, back to the ground. It horrified a few of you that I should treat such a venerable plant this way but now I can reassure you all that as well as rooting a number of cuttings that I was able to give away, the plant is responding by sending up a mass of new shoots, see below, which should result in a more floriferous plant that will stay compact for a number of years before I repeat the process.





Another update of a propagation method that I use for *Dactylorhiza*, see [bulb log 3211](#) and [4511](#). This is a box where I planted the old stems of *Dactylorhiza* 'Eskimo Nell' directly into leaf mould so they could form additional offsets. Some of these are two years old and the empty corner on the bottom right is where I removed some of the bigger bulbs to take over to the VRV meeting in Belgium last November. Most of these should grow on the produce flowering sized bulbs by August when I will lift them, remove the new bulb and replant the stems back into the box to start the process again.



Erythronium and *Trillium* naturalising as I allow them to self seed under some large *Rhododendrons*. These *Rhododendrons* have had all their lower branches removed to raise the crown allowing enough light in to keep the bulbs growing and flowering well.



Humus bed

Formally we referred to peat beds but now they can be more accurately called 'humus beds' as we have not added peat for twenty or more years. Within our garden we are self sufficient in leaf mould and garden compost which gives us the high organic content that we use in these beds. We add it both at replanting and as a mulch spread in the late winter before the bulb growth starts.



Erythronium oregonum leaves

Creating a good open soil rich in organic matter to imitate a woodland-floor, woody-type soil along with our cool moist climate allows us to grow these beautiful bulbs without many problems. This group of Erythronium oregonum seedlings have such beautiful dark markings that it is almost worth growing them for the leaves alone.



Another few views across the garden and some of the beds as I continue my walk around show the effect that you can get by under planting trees and shrubs with a wide range of compatible bulbs.



The bulb bed that I showed a number of times earlier in the year as it went through different stages of growth featuring *Eranthis*, *Galanthus*, *Crocus*, *Corydalis* etc now enters a more leafy stage with the tall *Fritillaria imperialis* towering above.



Lots of hanging Erythronium flowers like semi closed umbrellas await some warm weather in this plunge bed.



It is interesting to note that different species start to reflex at different temperatures - *Erythronium elegans* along with a few *E. hendersonii* flowers above, both open at much lower temperatures and light levels than do those of *Erythronium sibiricum* below, photographed at the same time.



Erythronium sibiricum flowers do not like the rain and often the ends of the tepals start to go brown and stick to one another so even if it does warm up the flowers cannot open freely without some intervention.

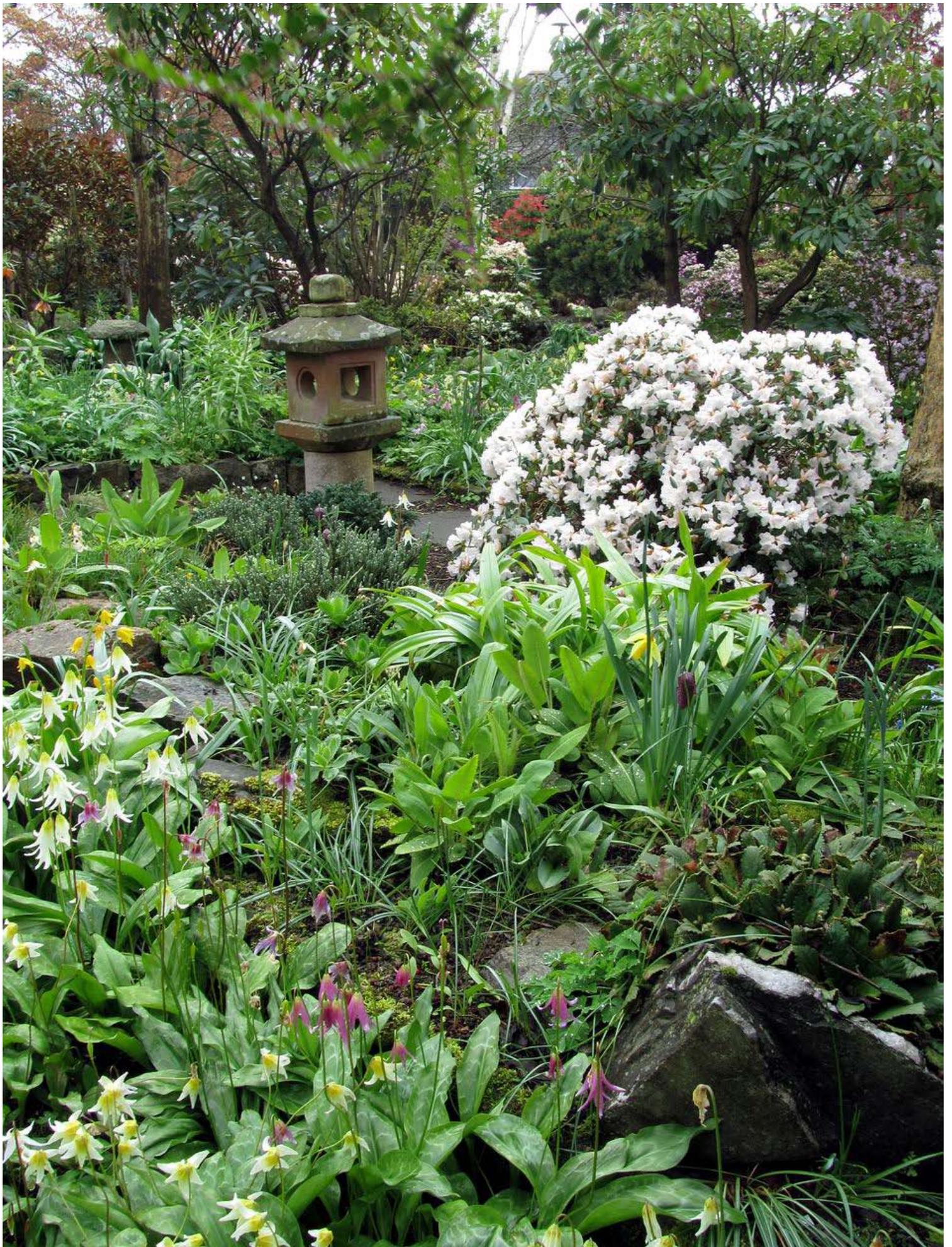


Trilliums do not have this problem because once they open they stay open like these *Trillium kurabayashii*.



Trillium grandiflorum

This Trillium with its long stem below the Dicentra leaves and with its flowers and leaves sitting on top enjoys the company and the moisture retained by the total ground cover provided by its companion.



I will leave you this week with another view across part of the garden.