



BULB LOG 44..... 2012



Colchicum speciosum



On Friday we were hit with the first snow fall of the season, it started to fall in the morning with brief white out conditions but it did not get a chance to lie, melting soon after it fell, until darkness came. By the time I went to bed at 10pm the view from the window was of a winter wonderland with a thick covering of snow over the ground and all the trees and shrubs. I thought I would take some pictures to show you next day but in the early hours the temperature rose turning the snow to rain which by daylight had melted away most of the snow.

Last week I concentrated on the autumn colour at ground level like the scene above showing Colchicum

speciosum against a background of fallen leaves and this week I turn my eyes upwards to the trees.

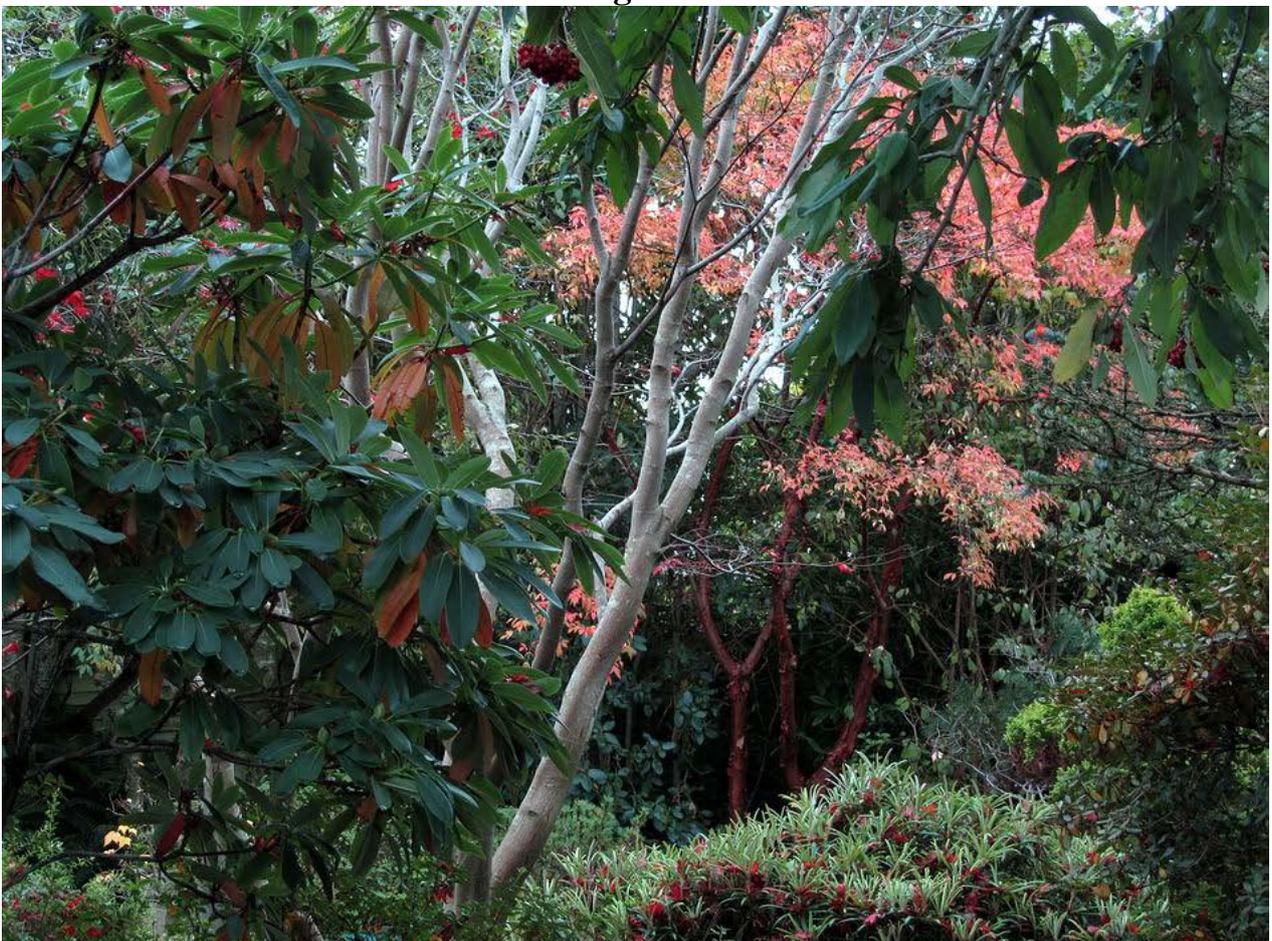


In the front garden an Acer still clings onto some of its fiery coloured leaves despite the snow and wind - further round, *Acer griseum*, below, is also a wonderful sight.





Acer griseum



The glorious autumn leaves of another *Acer griseum* shining through from the top of our back garden will soon be gone but the decorative bark remains a feature all year round.

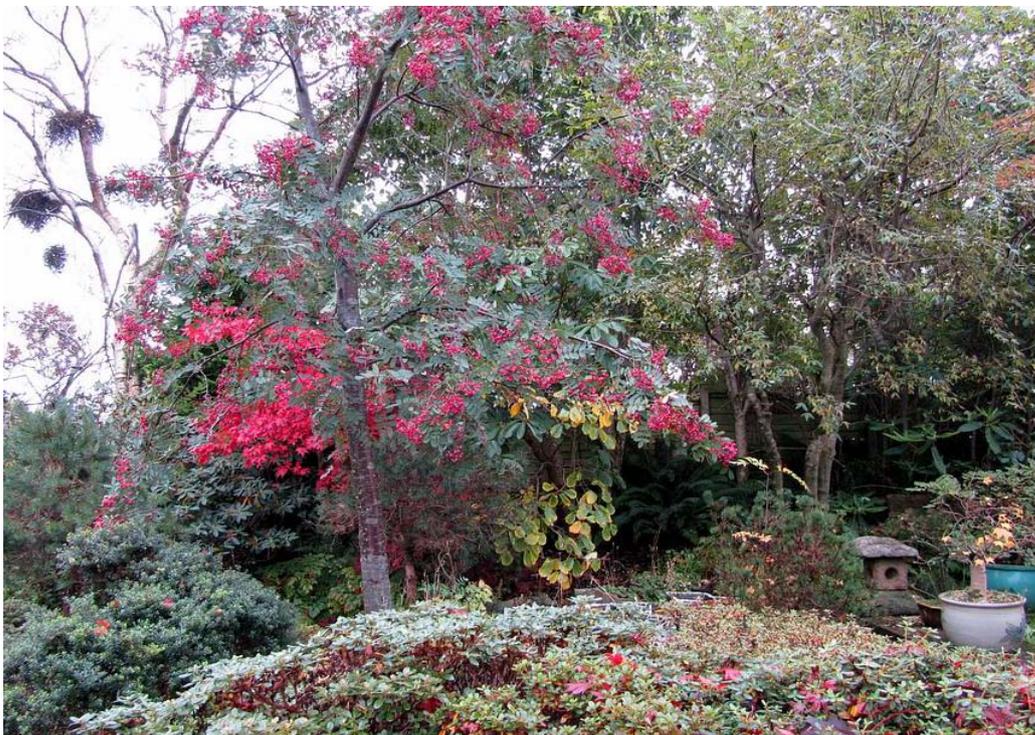


Acer 'Osakazuki' starts the year with green leaves which turn this wonderful red before they drop while the Acer below, I cannot remember its's cultivar name, has red leaves all year round the colour just intensifies in autumn.





Garden view



I was listening to the radio gardening program the other day and the question was 'how do you attract birds into the garden'? I could not believe it when a colleague answered 'hang up some fatballs' - surely the listener was expecting a gardening solution from a gardening phone in program? Yes, balls of fat can lure hungry birds into the garden but far better to create a habitat that will attract our feathered friends. We have done just that by planting plenty of trees and shrubs to provide birds with shelter from both the weather and predators. I have friends nearby who fill bird feeders only to see the contents

going mouldy because very few birds venture in to a flat feature-less garden that provides no cover. Trees and shrubs also provide a steady food source for the birds most obviously by the ripening berries appearing at this time of year such as **Sorbus hupehensis** above. Water is also essential to attracting birds and they need this all year round. Our pond, which is just off to the right of this picture gives a steady source of water for the birds to both drink from and bathe in. We make sure that a small area remains open water when it is freezing. Berries ripen at different rates and unsurprisingly the birds tend to eat them in the order they become ripe – nothing to do with the colour which is a common misconception.



By having a number of different tree species and cultivars you will extend the season of food in the form of ripe berries to supply the birds. Our first Sorbus berries to ripen are long gone now while others remain untouched but it is some of our Cotoneaster trees (above) that ripen very late keeping their berries well into the winter before they become palatable to the birds. As well as the berries the trees and shrubs support masses of insects which have to take their place in the food chain by feeding the birds. We only supplement the bird food with sunflower seeds when the weather gets very extreme and the birds have used up all the natural food in our garden habitat. By observing the birds carefully I can detect when the natural food source provided by our garden is diminishing and only then do I feed them. As I write the garden is alive with hundreds of sparrows, finches and tits going around the trees and shrubs eating their fill of insects.



It is not just the big trees that colour up – for most of the year you would hardly notice this *Salix hylematica* growing over the sides of this trough but in all its autumn glory it is hard to miss.



At last more of our autumn flowering Crocus species are flowering in the bulb house. I have long speculated what the trigger is for these autumn flowers and still stick with my hypothesis that it is a temperature gradient that stimulates them – a fall from warm to cool rather than an absolute temperature. Whether it is a daily temperature gradient or a more seasonal one I am not sure neither am I sure if other factors are involved but I suspect they are. I have often heard it said that it is water that is the trigger as the bulbs in the wild often appear shortly after the rains. However I have witnessed Crocus and Colchicum bulbs flowering without any water present and have read of reports of this in the wild. Rain falling floods the ground with moisture but more critically I think it is that this plunges the ground temperature down. No doubt the presence of water stimulates root growth in the bulbs but it is not directly the trigger for flowering in my view. This year has reinforced my view as the flowering is some two to three weeks later than recent years. With a cool summer the temperature gradient into autumn was also smaller which would account for the later flowering as it took longer for the critical gradient to be reached. I would be very interested to read any other suggestions [on the forum](#).





Crocus cancellatus



Crocus serotinus salzmannii



Crocus laevigatus

The first of my *Crocus laevigatus* flowers - a species that flowers for me in autumn, winter and into the early spring.

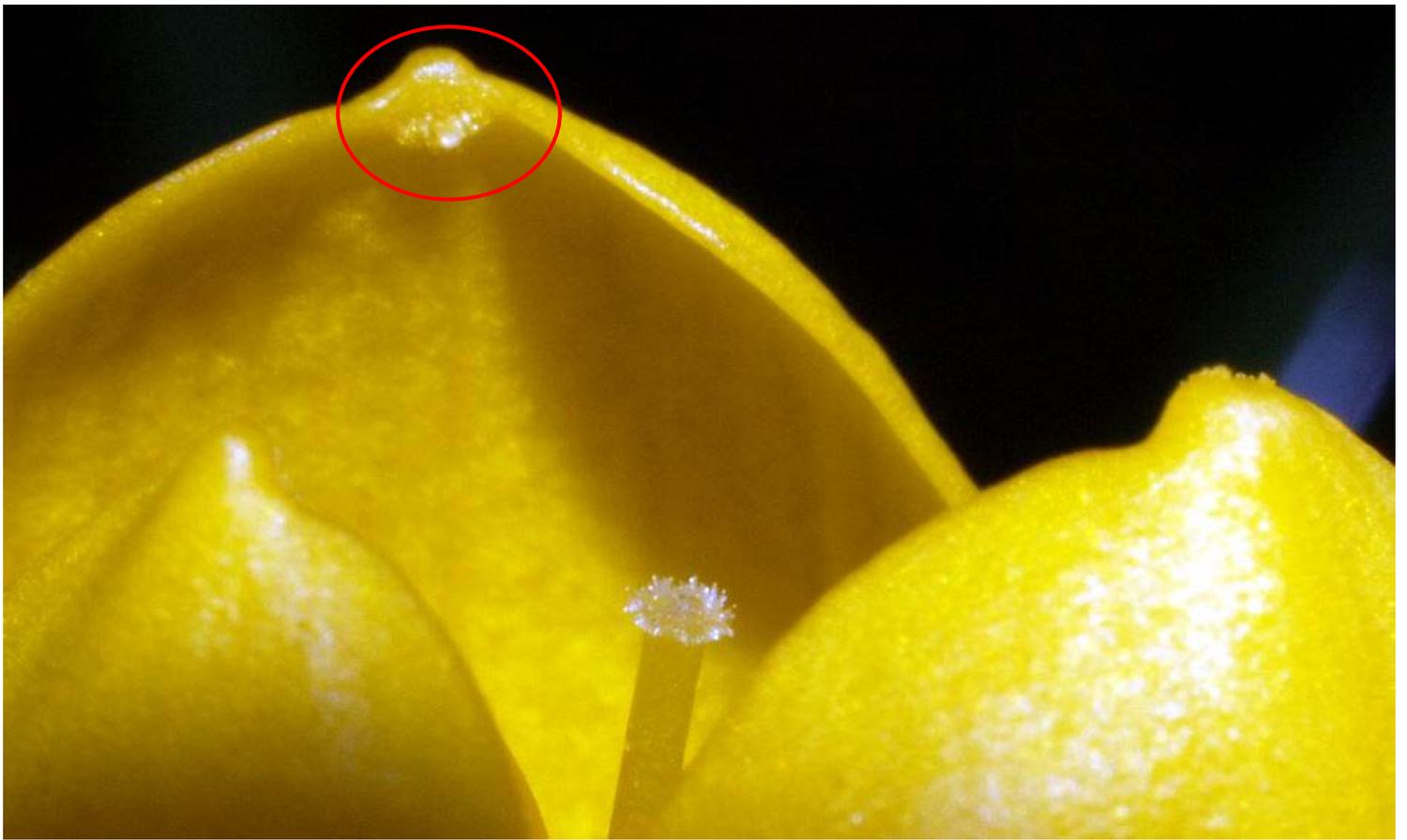


Sternbergia lutea

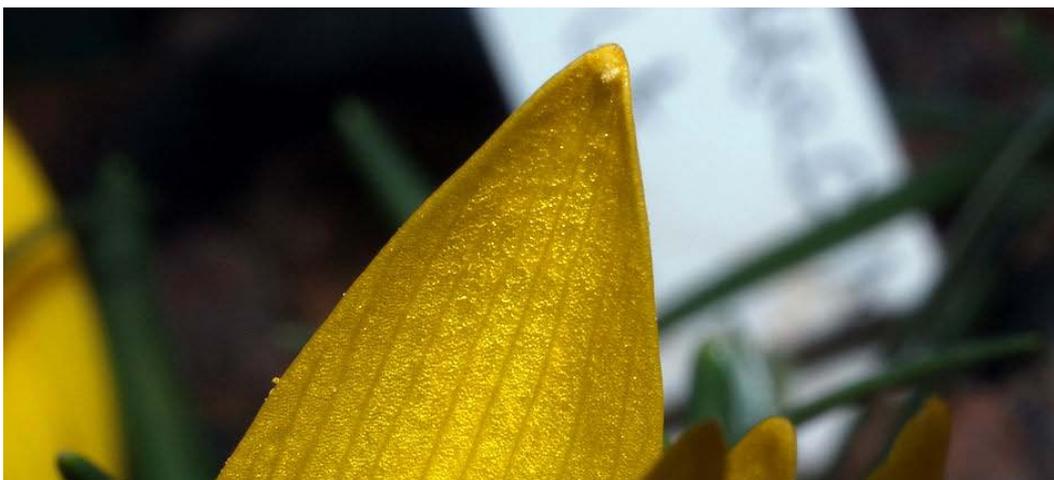
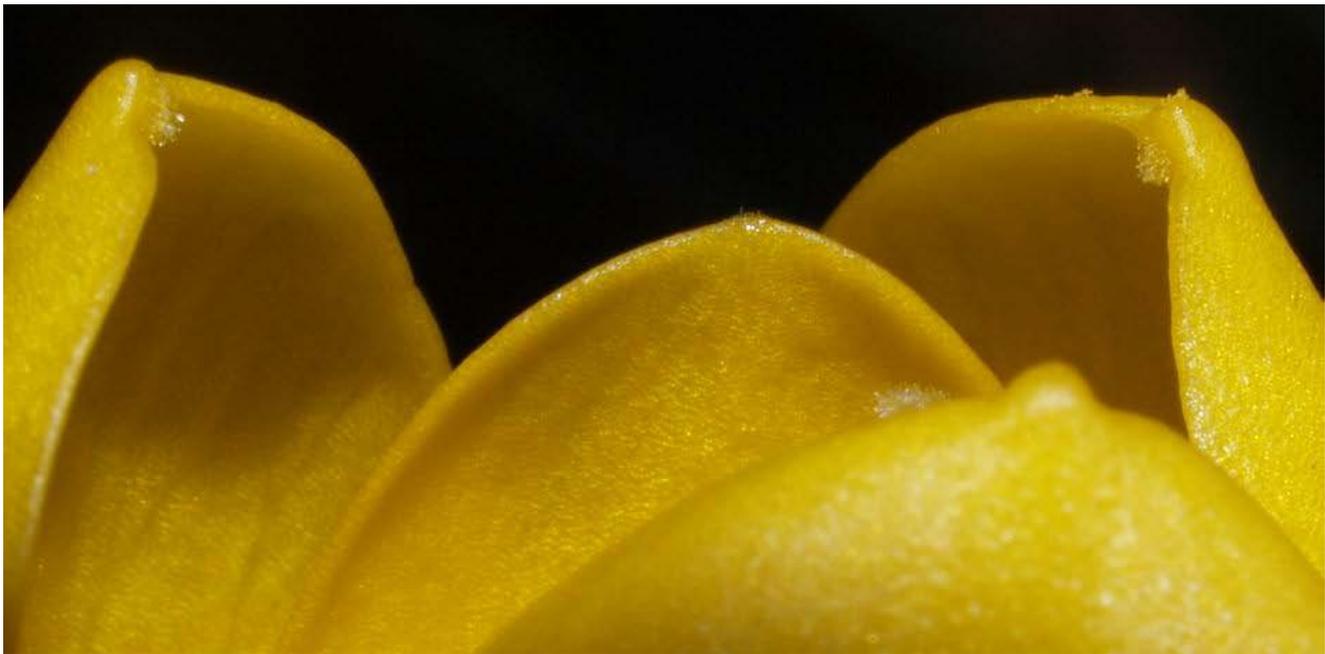


Sternbergia sicula

The debate of what exactly is the difference, if indeed there is one, between *Sternbergia lutea* and *Sternbergia sicula* rumbles on but in my view, that of a grower, there is a clear one. The shape of the floral segments can be clearly seen in the two pictures above. I must say how pleased and encouraged I am to see that almost all the *Sternbergias* I was given by a kind forumist to replace my losses from the big bad winter of 2010/11 are flowering again this year despite the relatively cool summer we had. This gives me hope that my non flowering plants may be a clonal issue and not just the lack of summer heat here in the north.



The stigma is obvious in the foreground but also take note of the similar ' sticky hairs' on the tips of the tepals.



These additional pictures show not only these appendages at the ends of all the floral segments, though they are more developed in the outer three, but also the clear difference in their shape between *Sternbergia lutea* above and *S. sicula*, left.



While many of our trees are in the last stages of shedding their leaves many of the Cotoneasters can be green all through the winter.



The *Acer japonicum* trees to the left that I raised from seed usually hang on to their leaves well into November. This week's parting message - trees and shrubs make your garden more attractive to both humans and wildlife.....