



BULB LOG 08.....24th February 2016





I return to the familiar view from my window seat from where I plot many a scheme and this week's task is staring me in the face. The Pieris is one of the original plants dating back to the days we first started this garden in 1975. In fact we moved the Pieris from a narrow border we had at our first flat, since then it has been regularly pruned and shaped to open up the planting space below. If we had left it to grow it would be much larger than it is now and bushy all the way to the ground. I like the view of the garden to be partially obstructed by shrubs so that you cannot see everything from one point but I want there to be tantalising glimpses of what is beyond to encourage you to move around and the Pieris is now blocking out too much of my view so rather than the annual pruning more drastic action is needed.



We ended up with a huge heap of prunings, we probably took more growth off the bush than we left on, but this was soon reduced by our trusty shredder to a single bag for the compost heap.



Our ever changing weather can prove a challenge to the plants and the gardeners. The hardy plants have evolved to cope with the freezing night time temperatures even the new growth is adapted to cope with frosts. The foliage of Corydalis 'Craigton Blue' grows through the winter, lying flat and encrusted with

ice when it is freezing then sitting up again unharmed as it warms up –colder temperatures are needed before the Galanthus are similarly affected.



Hellebore stems curl downwards in the freezing conditions but are unharmed and will stand up as the frost lifts.



Likewise the Cyclamen leaves curl and darken in colour as they freeze but survive unharmed.

Even the hardy native *Digitalis* leaves are limp and frozen.

I left this clump of self-seeded *Digitalis* that appeared after we re-worked the front garden two years ago. There is a tendency among some gardeners to pull these out as weeds just because they are easy and come free but we decided that it would be nice to enjoy their flowers this year.





Erythronium caucasicum

Gardening is full of joys and disappointments, a week ago I was excited to spot the first flower bud appearing on this *Erythronium caucasicum* – this plant is always the first of the genus to flower for us. This week, when I went back to photograph it, I discovered the flower was gone – eaten by something. It is not the first time the flowers on this plant have been eaten off - at least in previous years I have lost the flower after it opened. I half suspected wood pigeons or mice to be the culprit but this year the leaf is also well chewed possibly by a slug or snail. Until I know exactly what is causing the damage it is difficult to know how I can prevent it.



Fortunately it is not our only plant of *Erythronium caucasicum* -

There are a number planted around the garden as well as some in pots so my attention has turned to protecting them. For me it is not just the frustration of not enjoying the flower but more importantly the fact that I have no chance of getting seed. Another emerging flower bud in a nearby bed is looking very vulnerable and so I have taken measures to protect it.

If the culprit is the wood pigeon or another bird then this cage will protect the plant – however if this one is also eaten I will at least have narrowed down the list of possible culprits.



Erythronium caucasicum

A few weeks ago I showed a picture of a pot of *Erythronium caucasicum* seed just germinating and I mistakenly read the label thinking I had sown the seed too late in 2014 for germination to happen the following spring and hence was germinating now. However I have checked again and find that it was the bulbs I potted in 2014, they flowered last year (2015) and produced seed which I sowed back into the pot with the parent bulbs immediately it was ripe – hence they have germinated in the first spring.



Erythronium seed soaking

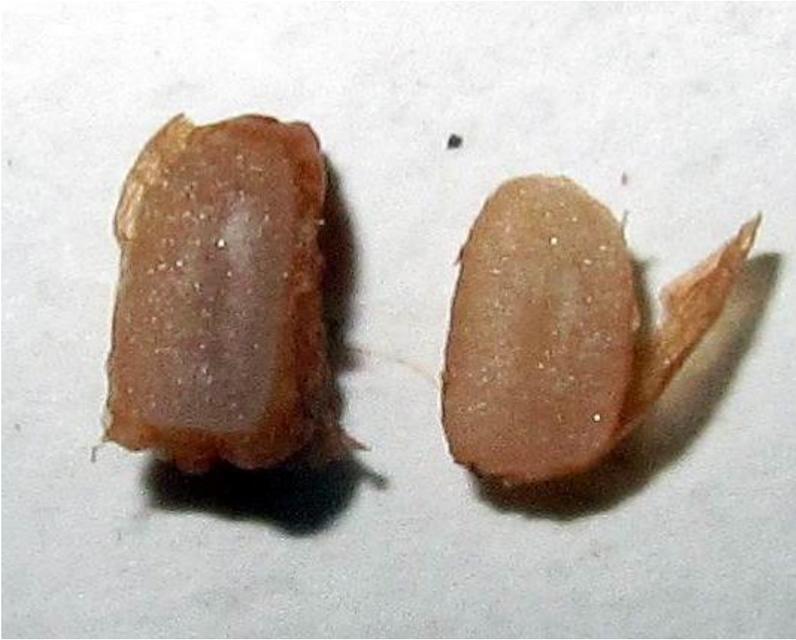
Seed is my favoured way of bringing plants into the garden and I was overjoyed to receive a quantity of Erythronium seed this week. These seeds are not fresh they have been stored in a fridge for some time and so were dry and shrivelled; however after soaking them for 24 hours in water with a tiny bit of soap to break the surface tension, the shrivelled seeds have absorbed moisture and plumped up nicely.



Erythronium seed after soaking.

I am sowing these seeds now outside my ideal time window of August/September which would normally give me the best results of quick germination. If they were last season's seed and I just received them I would store them until August before soaking and sowing them but as these seeds have

been dormant and stored for a number of years I decided it was best to soak them and sow them now. My thinking is that the more periods of freezing and warming these older seeds go through the better the chance of breaking down their long dormancy and as I have illustrated earlier we are currently experiencing successive periods of freezing and thawing which is likely to continue for several more weeks.



Erythronium seed section

I sectioned a few of the soaked seeds to see if there was any sign of life and indeed I am encouraged by what I see.



Erythronium seeds sown

I have sown all the soaked seed by scattering them on the surface of a pot of equal parts sand, grit and leafmould to which I have added some bone meal and will cover them with a layer of gravel. Seeds are a parcel of hope - I do not expect any germination this year and while I am optimistic that I may see some germination next spring I am aware that with the age of the seed any germination is likely to be sporadic over a number of years.



Engraving tool and labels

I make labels by cutting up old metal slatted window blinds and engraving the plant names with a hobby engraver tool. The labels are free, as I am recycling the aluminium, they do not go brittle and the writing does not fade.



Corydalis seeds

At the same time as I received the Erythronium seed I also received another package which included a number of packets of Corydalis seeds. Corydalis seeds are notoriously difficult to store successfully and are best sown as soon as they are ripe but these have been perfectly stored in moist sand and I know from previous experience of seeds from this source that they should germinate this spring.



I sowed the *Corydalis* seeds complete with the sand onto the surface of the same potting mix as described above. These pots will also be topped off with a layer of grit before being placed into an open frame.



I have now split the big cluster of *Lilium pyrenaicum* bulbs I showed a few weeks ago and they have been planted up individually.

The largest of the bulbs already shows the signs of dividing into two so I can look forward to another super heavy weight bulb in another few years.



Narcissus bulbocodium flowering in the bulb-house.



Our yellow Hamamelis is now in full flower at the south end of the garden, it is always later to open than the red one nearer the house.





**Eranthis
hyemalis**

Monday was the best day of sunshine we have had for a while and by mid-afternoon the temperature had climbed up high enough for the Eranthis to open their flowers for the first time this year. As the sun went off them they quickly closed again.



Galanthus of the 'Mighty Atom' group also opened their large flowers on short stems.



Now instead of blocking my view the new look Pieris offers those tantalising glimpses to other parts of the garden. I will work on the pruning to better develop a 'cloud' pruned effect.....