



BULB LOG 33 15th August 2018



The cover picture is of another form of **Roscoea purpurea**, 'Red Gurkha' which is the nearest to a true red that is known in this genus. It has become a much desired plant but in my view, while I accept it has an interesting colour, there are much better forms of this species around.

When I start a job in the garden it is like setting out on a journey where I do not know the destination - one task leads onto another, then another ... this Bulb Log shares with you a series of tasks from one day this week.



In [Bulb Log 2818](#) I illustrated transferring some cuttings which had rooted under mist into a box of sand to wean them off reliance on the mist. At the time I also took a few cuttings of *Campanula nitida* and placed them directly in the sand box: they can be seen in the front of row four from the left.

Campanula nitida

Four weeks on these same cuttings are rooted and ready to be planted out directly into a trough or raised bed - however I am not ready for that yet and as I would like to use the sand box for more cuttings I have decided to pot them up along with all the other cuttings from this box.





The roots on these cuttings of ***Helichrysum coralloides*** and ***Celmisia hectorii*** have grown substantially in the sand box and are well able to support themselves. Often I would leave plants in the sand box until I was ready to plant them out however, as with the campanula cuttings, their ultimate destination is not prepared (or known) yet.



With the cuttings all potted up now all I have to do is give them a good watering



I use around 50% grit in the potting mix so when I water the surface becomes self-mulching as the finer materials wash down into the mix.



The reason I had to pot on those cuttings was because I needed the box of sand for some saxifrage cuttings. The change in weather from the recent very hot and dry to a more familiar cool moist, almost autumnal feel, has encouraged the Saxifragas to emerge from their summer survival mode and enter another phase of growth, which is an ideal time to

take some cuttings. Spring cuttings root quickest under mist but I have found that at this time of year I struggle to wean cuttings off the mist before the end of the growing season, however leaving them in a box of moist sand and making sure they do not dry out, they will be rooted and ready to plant by the spring.



Rooted cuttings of *Crinodendron hookerianum* and *Embothrium coccineum*.



While I was potting on cuttings I checked to see if there were any in the mist unit that were ready to be moved on and I found that the *Crinodendron hookerianum* and *Embothrium coccineum* cuttings I took in the late spring were both rooted.

I have rooted *Crinodendron hookerianum* many times so knew that would be successful but I have never tried *Embothrium coccineum* before. I hate wasting material and when I was trimming back the growth of these shrubs earlier in the year I tried some of the semi-ripe cuttings in the mist and I am pleased to see they have both rooted.

As a result of the success of the *Embothrium coccineum* cutting I checked the growths on the shrub and saw that to keep it at a reasonable size it was ready for another trim back so I have made another group of cuttings which are in the mist unit now.

***Crinodendron hookerianum* flower**



Crinodendron hookerianum

You may remember that earlier this year this *Crinodendron hookerianum* was blasted by the freezing winds which killed the new growth and leaves so I cut it hard back to the healthy mature wood – now there is plenty new growth for me to structure plus the bonus of some flowers.



Looking across the Arisaema forest towards a mature shrub of *Vaccinium nummularia* that was growing too far into the bulb bed; so reluctantly I cut it back. I used some of the material to make cuttings which you will see first rooted under the mist, weaned in the sand box and now potted on.



I have grown this delightful slow growing shrub for forty years and found that it does not respond too well to being cut back, in that new growths rarely appear from the older cut back stems. Over the years I have propagated it from cuttings to replace the older plants that have outgrown their position. I am especially delighted to see that this time there are some new growths emerging from low down on the old cut back wood.



Corydalis 'Craigton Purple'

Corydalis 'Craigton Purple' is one of my newer hybrids which I have been working to propagate. I have two stock boxes and now that it has finished flowering and the leaves are yellowing, this is a good time to divide it.

The first step is to cut back the old growth so that I can see what I am doing. I leave a stem of 3-4 centimetres because there are often secondary buds on the bottom of the stem.





Corydalis 'Craigton Purple'

The growths are, loosely speaking, a 'bulb' with a very open cluster of scales which sit just on the surface, in this selected form they have a deep purple colour when exposed to the light.



Similar growths form in clusters among the roots around the main bud but they do not extend as readily as you will observe in Corydalis 'Craigton Blue' (below).



The top two are **Corydalis 'Craigton Purple'** which tends to stay in a clump - below that are some of my other hybrid **Corydalis 'Craigton Blue'** which produces stolons along, which a series of buds form, so it spreads out.



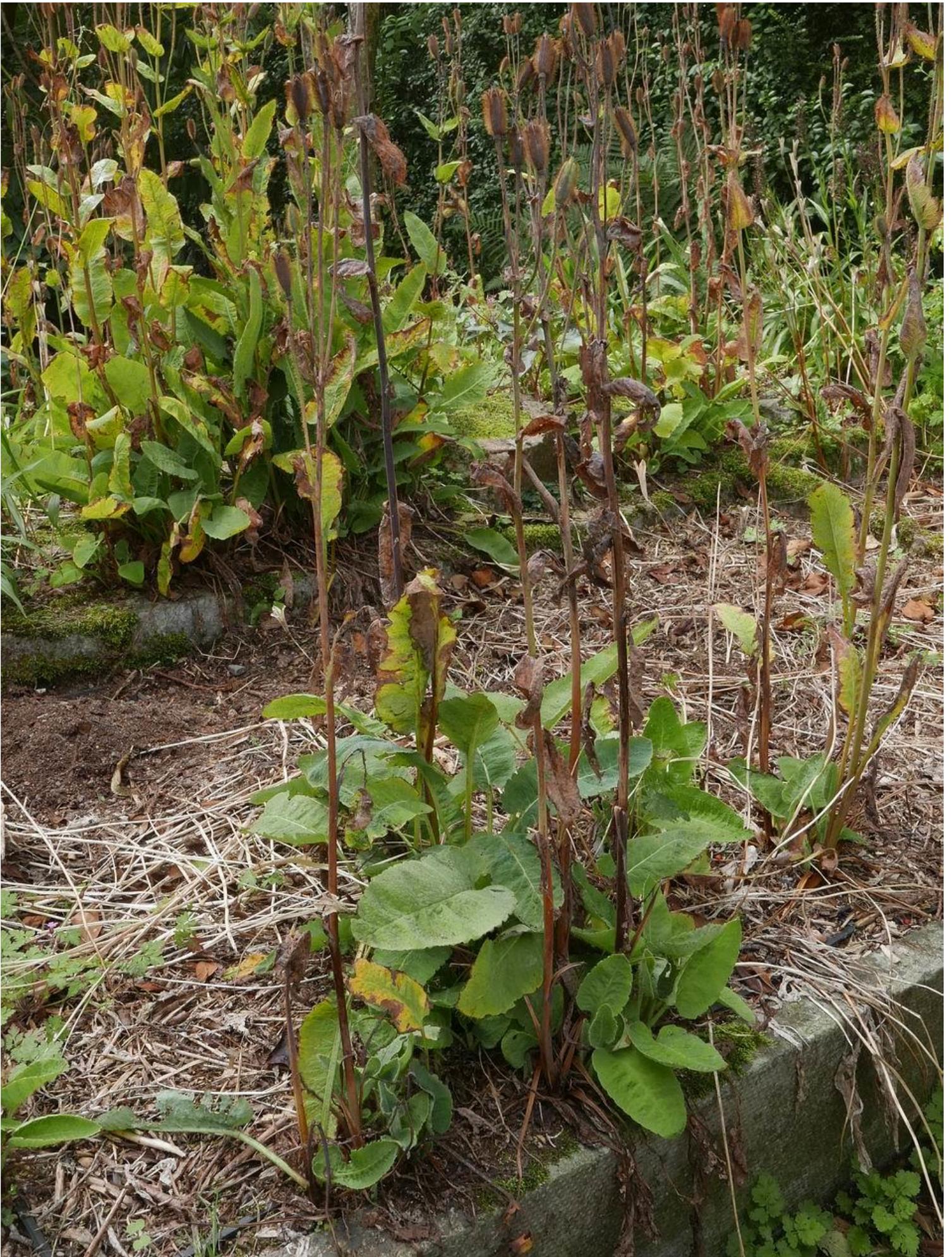
Having divided **Corydalis 'Craigton Purple'** into individual growths I can replant the box and have some more material to share with friends, some of whom are nursery owners, so the plants can enter the supply chain!



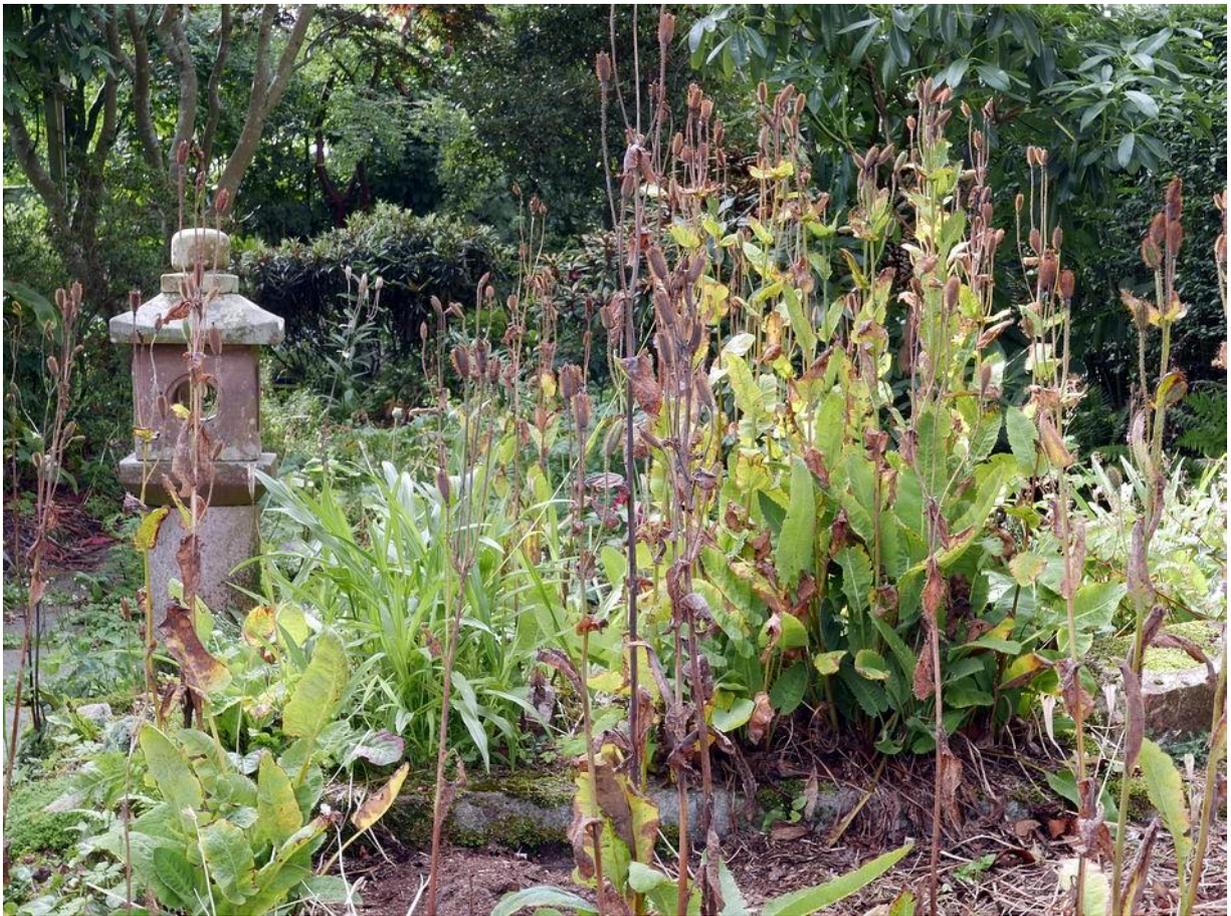
Along the route map of this week's cascading jobs I now need to mix a small amount of a specific potting mix: not enough to need to use our cement mixer which anyway is already sitting full of our standard potting mix so I revert the 'two bucket' method that I often use.



Put all the materials sand, grit, leaf mould and bone meal into one bucket then pour the contents from a height into the other bucket: repeat this between three and five times by which time your contents will be perfectly evenly mixed together and ready to use.



While I was sorting out the *Corydalis* boxes I noticed the ripe seed pods on the *Meconopsis* and on checking those I also find that in response to the cooler moist conditions there is vigorous new growth from the side shoots at the base of the stems. As these will form next seasons flowering stems I cut back this year's stems to allow maximum light and air into the new growths.



Above is the scene before I cut the stems back and below, after, with the cut tops and the seed pods placed upside down in a paper bag to collect the seed.





To mix the compost in the buckets, I needed to go to the top of the garden to get some leaf mould and took a short cut through the bed where earlier in the year I chopped back some rhododendrons. Now it is opened up I intend to plant this area with Trillium, Erythronium, etc.

As I passed through this space I looked at the two cut down stumps (that I had intended to

remove) when something special drew my eye.



There growing at the base of one of the stumps was **Epipactis helleborine** and the fact that it has two flowering stems suggests to me that it has been growing there, hidden under the Rhododendron, for a number of years. For years our attempts to introduce *Epipactis gigantea* have failed miserably; it just did not seem to like our growing conditions however here growing, much like it would in the wild, in a deep layer of leaf litter we have *Epipactis helleborine*.



Epipactis helleborine

I have no idea where it came from, I certainly did not plant it and have no recollection of ever having brought a plant in: I can only presume that somehow it has come in by seed and found the perfect habitat.

Back on the sequence of jobs, I am thinning out the growth of *Dicentra* hybrids (*formosa* x *eximia*) which run through this bed. I like the decorative effect in the spring of the ground cover of *Dicentra* foliage with a range bulbs growing through it but it is just getting too strong a grip so I am intervening to restore a balance.



As well as the hybrid *Dicentra* we also grow *Dicentra cucullaria* here - both grow in the humus rich surface layer, typical of species that have evolved in woodlands, luckily it is very easy to distinguish them as *Dicentra cucullaria* has bulbs covered in rice grains and the hybrids have running stolons. The fact that they grow in the surface layer makes removing them a relatively easy task while the other bulbs in this bed are all in their summer rest growing deeper in the soil. I am planting all the *Dicentra cucullaria* back taking care to plant it very near the surface – if you plant it too deep it will gradually work its way back up to the surface layer and it will not flower until it gets there.



While I am down lifting the Dicentra I notice these fat seed pods on some of the Trilliums: nearby other slightly smaller ones are bursting open ready to spill the valuable contents of seed.



Trillium seed

I decide that I better do something with the seed so now divert on to another domino effect task of sowing the seed.



While I will leave some of the seed to naturalise around the parent I will collect the rest to sow elsewhere. In recent years rather than sowing it in pots I have sown the seed directly into a large sand seed bed but before I can do that I need to clear some space, bottom right of the above picture. Clearing the space involves lifting some now mature trillium, the result of a sowing from four years ago, and now these need planting elsewhere.



I would not normally recommend lifting trilliums at this time of year it is much better to lift and divide them just as the flowers fade, however as these are growing in nothing but sand it is very easy to get them up without damaging the roots.

These now need planting immediately: some into the bed where I was clearing the *Dicentra*, others in the bed where I found the *Epipactis*.

When I am planting I divide some down to single noses while

leaving others in clumps in an attempt to make it look more natural.



Individual Trillium noses ready for planting and while I was lifting them I also scooped up a *Lilium mackliniae* bulb.

The sand seed bed is a great way to grow on bulbs from seed where many reach flowering size a year or so earlier than they do if sown in pots. As you can see as well as the *Lilium mackliniae* other plants seed freely in as well and I am relaxed about most of them - providing they are shallow rooting - in fact they may even benefit the seedling bulbs as I have observed that *Erythronium* seedlings grow on for weeks longer than their counter parts in pots which is the reason that they reach flowering size quicker. The weedy plants are easily scooped away in late autumn when the bulbs have all retreated underground.





And now I have some clear space in the sand, I can sow that Trillium seed –mixing the fleshy pulp surrounding the seed with some sand and rubbing it gently in my hands separates the seeds out ready for scattering. I then work them into the top 3cms of sand.



Many times I leave plants such as these Roscoea to sow themselves, forming natural looking colonies – the Meconopsis and Saxifrage in the foreground are also self sown here.



You can see the stem, which elongates as the seed ripens, falling over under the weight depositing the seed exactly where it did in recent years - as evidenced by groups of seedlings.

I think I have enough there now so I will collect this seed when it ripens and sow it elsewhere this year.



***Roscoeas purpurea* 'Red Gurkha'**

Now Roscoeas brings me nicely back to the cover picture of *Roscoeas purpurea* 'Red Gurkha' growing in the bed where I was clearing some of the *Dicentra*.



Another form of **Roscoea purpurea**, '**Harvington Imperial**' also grows in this bed and has much more appeal to my aesthetics with its maroon stems, dark green leaves topped off by at this stage three flowers open at once - this is a superb plant.



The diverging route that leads from my starting job often triggers so many other tasks that I don't get the original job finished however one task that must be completed by mid-day every Wednesday is the Bulb Log - so here for you is this week's Bulb Log Diary.....