



SRGC

Bulb Log Diary

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BULB LOG 02.....10th January 2018





This moss covered mushroom reflects back to the very thing that fired my interest in plants way back in 1962 when I joined a group 'The Northern Naturalists' who had regular excursions to observe all kinds of nature, animal, mineral and vegetable. Then my main interest was in the rocks and geology then on one mountain trip a lady explained that you could often tell the type of rock by the plants that grew there – from that moment I was hooked. At one time I cleaned the moss from this stone but in recent years I have left it to establish a colony and now I view it as a habitat where I have scattered some seeds of *Erinus alpinus* to see if any will grow.

In the background of the cover image you will see another stone mushroom, pictured below, which has no moss at all only some lichens.

This one being in more shade would seem the more likely to have a growth of moss so why is it this way? The difference is the type of stone; the moss covered rock is schist while the other is granite – which takes me back to what that lady explained to me on a mountain top in Scotland all those years ago.





Winter is the season where I can appreciate the garden stripped back to the basic structure when even the fallen leaves and other plant debris awaiting the clear-up have an attraction.

I salvaged a number of granite paving slabs and kerb stones some 30 years ago when the Aberdeen Council in their wisdom thought it better that the city known as the 'Granite Capital of Europe' should be paved in concrete and tarmac!



Some of the kerbs formed the raised edges of the rock garden while I made some stone benches with others.



I carved out some of the beautiful granite paving slabs to form troughs; two are seen here raised up on some granite cobble stones which used to pave our roads and were also being replaced around that same time.



It was hard work chiselling out the planting space in those granite slabs plus they were very heavy so I went on to develop the lighter weight fish box troughs - first just by carving and painting the polystyrene then by coating them with cement such this one.



Getting back to the moss - I also used to spend hours removing the moss from this sand bed but for the last year I decided to leave it. Nobody is there to remove the mosses in nature so I will observe if its presence has any effect on the growth of the bulbs



The frozen Cyclamen leaves look unhindered by the moss as do the various Crocus leaves emerging through the soft green carpet and I like the more natural appearance – time will tell.



Cyclamen coum
flowers are emerging at
the edge of the sand
bed.

Over the years my
garden philosophy has
moved towards that of
a being a habitat
manipulator where
through the
observation of plants
in nature and those
that self-seed around in
the garden I have
found so many more
planting opportunities
that I previously
missed or, in the name
of tidiness, cleared of
growth.



The rectangular formality of the pond was part of the original layout of the garden where we could display bonsai and other potted plants – now I am letting nature take its course while I also intervene to create new habitats like the marginal bed in the foreground, the moss covered rock planted with *Pinguicula* with other possibilities emerging as the moss covers the slabs. If I were starting again from scratch, with the benefit of the years of experience I have gained, I think the pond would be a more natural informal shape with a rock garden bed emerging from the pond.



I am especially looking forward to the first flowering in the new bed I made last summer, I remember I planted out quite a lot of seedlings, up to flowering size, of *Erythronium caucasicum*, *Erythronium sibiricum*, *Trillium rivale* and *Trillium hibbersonii* along with various *Corydalis* but there will be many surprises to come from the ones I don't remember.



This view reminds me of the structural and decorative importance of trees and shrubs in the garden.

These are especially noticeable in the winter when the eye is not distracted by the mass of foliage and flowers filling the surrounding beds as they do through the spring, summer and autumn.



What is the climate in your garden? A question that I am often asked and while I can give a general answer the fact is that our garden is full of micro climates. The two pictures above are taken within seconds of each other; one facing east then turning west to take the other and it shows how different the ground conditions look. The snow covered bed on the left is open to the sky while the bed on the right is under a canopy of Acer trees which even though they have no leaves at the moment have an effect not just on the amount of light or moisture that reaches the ground but also on the temperature at ground level.



I repeated these pictures a few days later when you can see that the open bed is covered in a hard frost while under the trees on the right there is no frost at all.

At the same time as I took the first pair of pictures the scene further up the garden shows a layer of ice covered the ground.

Typical of our weather since last week we have been through a mild spell followed by another freezing period and this scenario will repeat itself until the end of May or early June by which time we should not expect any more frosts.



While tidying I noticed these hellebore buds were extending so I removed last year's leaves to allow them more light so we can enjoy the flowers.



Shredder time again.



With so many trees and shrubs in a relatively small space we need to do a lot of managing, that is cutting back to keep the ground open, and winter is one of the best times to assess what needs to be removed. The herbaceous plants all being dormant underground now makes this the best time to get working access to the beds without damaging the plants.



Our shredder quickly turns a big pile of prunings into a valuable mulching material as I open up more ground planting space behind this seat.



Shrubs are stealth invaders of space - we get accustomed to the annual growth without always realising how much ground space that growth is taking over. Over the years we have lost a number of plants due to the slow but steady growth of some shrubs shading them out. Looking under these Rhododendrons shows a large area of ground where we once grew many Primula and Meconopsis.

During this year I intend to find a balance by opening up some of this area for ground planting while retaining as much of the interesting shrubs as is possible.

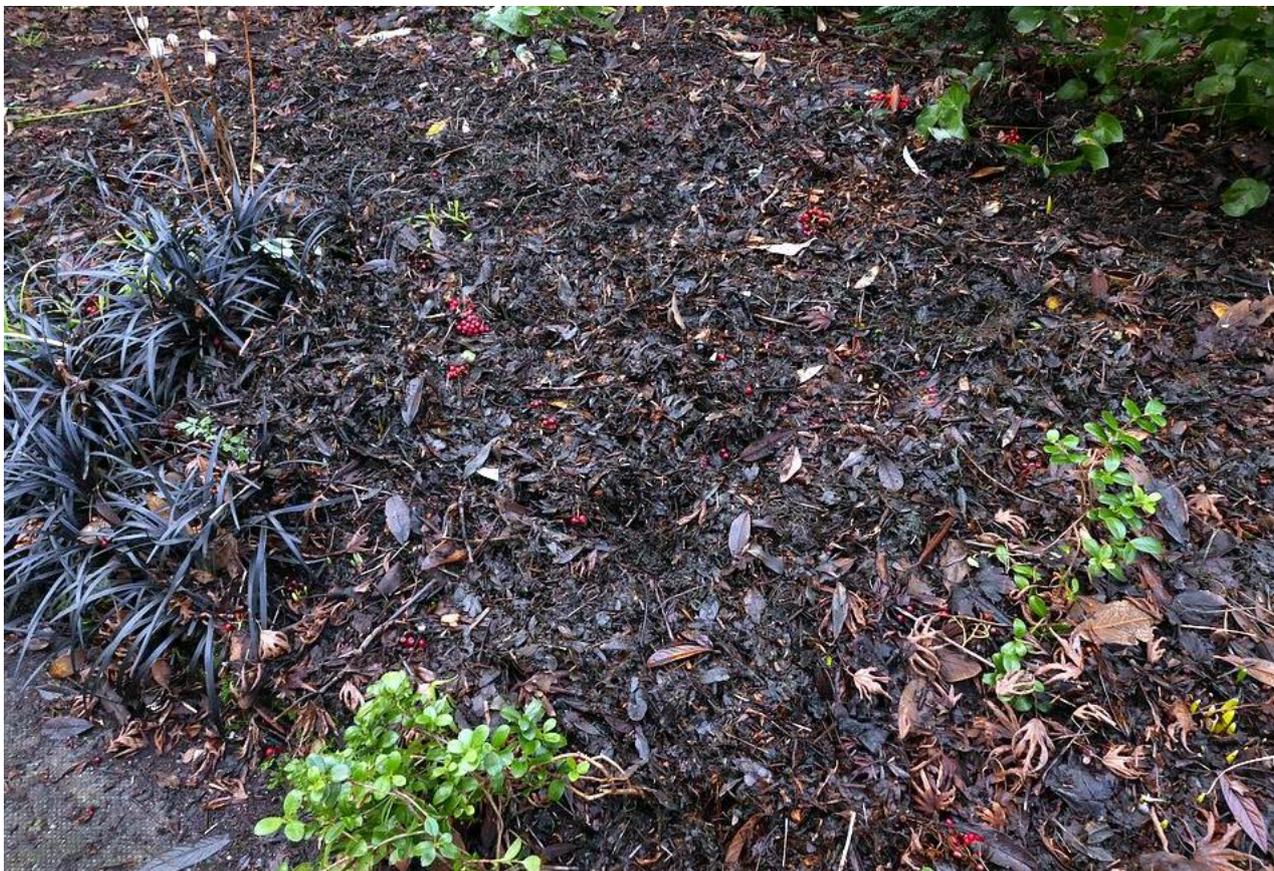


Piles of shredded material which at this time of year can be spread without composting.

Once I have spread out the mulch I scatter a small amount of NPK 7-7-7 growmore type fertiliser to help with the imminent burst of spring growth.



The process of cutting back, tidying and mulching will continue when the weather permits.



During the summer when I was cutting the hedges there was too much growth to spread the shavings directly so most had to go to the compost heaps but I did pile some under shrubs these heaps have now been spread out.



When I am spreading the mulch I am careful not to cover any of leaves still in growth such as the interesting combination of the golden *Miliium effusum* 'Aureum' and the black *Ophiopogon planiscapus*. I also left the dried now empty *Fritillaria* seed heads as a reminder of last season's flowers and the hope that when spring comes more will appear.



Shreddings from the compost heaps are now gradually being spread (left) while I have still to tidy other areas (below). I am very aware that with so many shoots starting to appear I have to get this job done before the mass growth starts to emerge then it becomes too difficult to spread the mulch without damaging the growth.





It is always interesting to compare how the garden changes through the seasons the current winter view above feels much more open with no leaves on the trees than it did in the summer (below) with the full canopy.





Garden view



View from back door.



In the front garden the piles of shreadings I piled under the tree a few months ago have also been spread across the bed.

The process of planting the trees along with regular mulching has manipulated our garden with its light sandy soil into that of a humus rich woodland type habitat.....