



BULB LOG.....12-12-2007

Bulb log 50 of year 5 brings me to another milestone in my one year project!! This is the 258th bulb log that I have written and there are two more yet to come in 2007. Has much changed I ask myself? The answer to that is yes and no. The cycle of growing bulbs is much the same - each week, and month sees many familiar flowers appear. I find it interesting to go back over the previous four years' logs to see what I showed and wrote about and see if the flowers opened at the same time or not.



Narcissus romieuxii mesatlanticus

This week for instance I find that most of the narcissus are behind the flowering time of the last few years by about a week.

What does change every year is what has grown well and what has suffered – this has not been my best year for growing crocus. Many of my crocus corms are very small and will take a year or so to get back to flowering size – was this my fault? It was the unusual very hot weather in April that forced many of the bulbs to go dormant before they had finished their full growth cycle.



Crocus michelsonii shoots

Few of the spring crocus produced any seeds and the old corm did not pass all its reserve onto the new emerging corms. One or two of the very earliest flowering species such as *Crocus michelsonii* did manage to finish their growth cycle before the hot period and are already producing good shoots.

I have learned this lesson and next time we get such a warm period early in the year I plan to remove the glass from the sides of the bulb houses in an effort to keep the temperatures lower. Last year, 2006, it was the *Fritillaria* that I did not do so well with; again due to a warm February followed by eight weeks of very cold damp weather, but they have recovered well during 2007. So due to our local weather each year we can expect to struggle with some bulbs while others will thrive and that is just the nature of growing bulbs – or any plants. The good thing is that bulbs have evolved to be survivors – the fact that they can retreat under ground and sit out a bad season is precisely what they are designed to do.



Cameras

Something else that has changed over the five years is the camera that I use. I am now on my fourth main digital camera but I have six in total. I have not been able to part with any of them not even my very first 1.3Mpixel Olympus which produced and still produces excellent pictures which I use all the time in my talks. The reasons for the regular changes of camera are more to do with me than they are to do with the quality of the images they capture. I am now very happy to be almost back to where I was with my pre-digital Olympus OM2 and favourite macro lens.

I have added a dedicated 35mm macro lens to my new Olympus digital camera which can cope well with any shot I want to take in the garden from ultra close to general scenes.

As with any of my new digital cameras it will take me a while to get used to all the functions and controls of my new one. It is important to read through the instruction manual and I try and learn a new control each few days so I can get the best results. White balance is very important as it will make a big difference to the colour of your pictures. When we look at a flower or scene our eyes also see the light source and our brain takes this into account and adjusts the colours we see accordingly. For instance when we look at a crystal white narcissus in strong yellow sun light we still see a crystal white flower but the camera sees the yellow light reflecting off the flower. By adjusting the white balance you can tell the camera you are working under sunshine and it will then adjust the colour of the image. Artificial light such as sodium or neon is often encountered in the Show Halls and this would result in a strong colour cast but we can adjust the white balance for this and get true colours – not something we could do easily with film.



Narcissus mesatlanticus flowers

It is not the best time to get a new camera as our weather is either very cold or very damp so there is not too much opportunity to take pictures just now but by the time the peak flowering season comes around I will know all the controls of my new camera. As well as working out the best white balance settings I have been playing with the macro lens and focus systems learning to use them efficiently.



Pollen

Getting in closer to the flowers (above) this is a full frame picture with out any manipulation. The shot was hand held in poor light so I used the small integral flash and bounced some light back with a sheet of white paper.



Anthers and filaments

Here is the same picture at full size – you can see the individual pollen grains and the cells of the filaments – I am pleased as I know I can do better in more suitable conditions

Bought cyclamen

I have discussed a sick cyclamen in the last few logs and here is another. This time it is one of the small commercial ones we bought for the house and its foliage started to flop. However, when I tried my first test – tugging gently on the leaves the whole corm came away in my hand and my fears were confirmed.



Vine weevil

Vine weevil had eaten through the roots just at the base of the corm. I thought the nursery trade had this problem under control but apparently not - the vine weevil love the pure peat compost. Beware if you buy any of these cyclamen and other plants that you may also be bringing in unwanted guests.



Beauty in decay

As there are not too many different flowers out just now I found myself photographing the dead and dying ones and they do have a beauty when you see them up close.



Withered Crocus flower

It is just a bit over a month before I head of to the other side of the planet to speak in New Zealand. I am looking forward to going and meeting up with so many friends some of whom I will meet face to face for the first time as I only know them through the forum. I am also looking forward to hearing Finn Haugli who is a superb lecturer and grower. It is not too late to book a place in the Conference in Christchurch and if you live in Australia or New Zealand you have no excuses – be there or be square.

Details - <https://www.srgc.org.uk/forum/index.php?topic=639.0>



Withered narcissus flower