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# Bulb Log Diary

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*Fuchsia procumbens*



The large flowers displayed on many plants shout out, demanding our attention, while there are others that are more modest that we need to seek out if we want to enjoy their unique beauty and one of those plants whose flowers just whisper is **Fuchsia procumbens**.

It is a prostrate shrub endemic to coastal areas of the North Island of New Zealand and it belongs to a South Pacific lineage that apparently diverged from all other fuchsias around 30 million years ago. For most of the year it hides underground

protected from the elements only sending up its trailing stems and small leaves when summer has taken charge.



Over the years it has reached out extending its territory to over two metres appearing among other shrubs as well as popping out between the rocks of the wall where I can best get in close to appreciate the colourful flowers. The seeds are carried in large red decorative fruits but we rarely see these in our garden partly because of the colder conditions of autumn prevents them ripening but also because they make tasty treats which are eaten by all types of wild life.



**Fuchsia procumbens**

This *Corydalis* sp. is another whispering plant with racemes of small yellow flowers over ferny foliage. We raised it from seed collected in the Himalaya by our late friend Alistair McKelvie. I am assuming it is a *Corydalis* although it could be a related fumaria – I would be grateful if anybody can identify it. It is a plant that seeds gently around the garden where I welcome its ferny foliage followed by the late appearance of the flowers.





Corydalis sp.?



Many of the summer flowering plants that seed around in the bulb beds are now turning to seed and we take control of what is allowed to shed seed. Soon I will clear most of the growth in this bed, making way so we can fully appreciate the autumn flowering bulbs, such as Colchicum, when they

appear.



We definitely want the seed of the Meconopsis so as soon as I spot the seed capsules opening I remove the stems by cutting them close to the base.



The flowering stem dies but a number of side shoots will form which if the conditions are suitable, i.e. not too hot and with plenty water, these will produce leaves then new rosettes that will flower next year.



Thankfully after a long unusually dry period the rains have returned - first with torrential downpours followed a few days later by more gentle rain. You could almost hear the drought stricken plants sighing with relief as they welcomed the rain will help build up the new growths on these Meconopsis.



I left a few of the Meconopsis stems standing to shed their seeds naturally continuing the self-seeding evolution on the rock garden bed and surrounding areas the rest I will store to catch the seed.



If you are saving the seeds it is important that you make sure there are no insects included or that can get in to eat their way through your seed. These insects will quickly eat the seeds if they are left in the capsules or get in the bag you are storing them in so it is wise to check the seed regularly until you sow it.



### **Papaver somniferum**

Choosing which plants that you want to leave to seed around is a matter of personal preference as well as practicality – I am happy to allow Papaver somniferum to seed around because it never becomes a problem and it appears and flowers after the main flowering of the early plants have finished their growth cycle.



Fritillaria along with most of the other bulbs in the garden are also left to seed around - the only exception being the *Hyacinthoides hispanica* hybrids which we dead head because they can be a bit thuggish and take over.



We also control the amount of seed shed by plants such as the *Aconitum*, *Aquilegia*, *Digitalis*, *Papaver cambricum* etc. which can also be too successful in their urge to take over the garden on the grounds that it is much easier to remove a few seed pods than it is to pull out hundreds of unwanted seedlings.



There are also self-seeding colonies of *Roscoeia scillifolia* and *R. alpina* growing below the *Meconopsis* on the rock garden bed and these are also enjoying the return of the rains especially as they are now forming their seeds.



Nearby other larger *Roscoeia* have just recently come into growth and these will also appreciate nature watering the garden - their flowers are still to come.



Some areas of the garden are looking more chaotic than usual as they go through a transitional stage. The Dicentra and other ground covering plants have collapsed sooner than in most years because of the unusual hot dry conditions but I do not rush to 'tidy' up because I accept it as part of the natural cycle in the garden as we await the emergence of the autumn flowering bulbs.



Ferns are always welcome in the garden with many proving remarkable resilient to excesses of wet or dry.



It is sometimes difficult to capture the vision you are experiencing in a single photograph so you may want to look more carefully at this image. It does capture the sensation that I get when standing looking over this scene however look carefully and you will see it is a composite of two views one looking across and the other looking down.



In the next sequence of pictures I share with you the current stage of growth in the wild areas and fields I have been recording on my walks.



The colourful flowers among the grasses and seed stems are provided by **Cirsium arvense** and **Senecio jacobaea** both of which are beautiful and a valuable natural resource plants which provide habitat and food for many pollinators and insects which in turn add to the food chain.



**Cirsium arvense**, the creeping thistle which, as the common name suggest, spreads by underground stolons as well as by seed, so can be invasive but in a place like this, it looks beautiful.



Although very different, **Centaurea nigra** shares a similar thistle like flower, and this is better behaved wild flower and would be great in a wildflower area of a garden.



**Chamaenerion angustifolium**, Rosebay Willow Herb, is one of the pioneering plants taking advantage of any opportunity and indeed they are beautiful when growing in a suitable place such as among the brambles.



Returning to the garden some plants do bear evidence of the recent hot dry conditions here I show some of the fronds on **Matteuccia struthiopteris** that caught too much of the sunshine when dry and they have shrivelled up.



The Ramonda are very tolerant at withstanding drought - before the rain a number of these plants were shrivelled and looked lifeless but I knew from experience that they would survive to recover when water returned.



You may have noticed this bare patch in the previous picture – it is where a foraging bird must have pecked away a rosette of Ramonda which later I found lying on the ground with the leaves and roots all dried out and shrivelled.



This shrivelled dry plant spent the night in a water tank where it could rehydrate.



The same plant the next day had fully plumped up; even what looked to be the dried lifeless remains of roots were now alive and full of life.



I took the opportunity to split the plant into single rosettes each of which had a number of new growths emerging around the base of the leaves so they will soon clump up again.



I planted one rosette back into the original spot and the other one went between the rocks of the nearby bed.



**Ramonda seed pods**



Never be too quick to remove the old leaves on your Ramondas because I have found that their roots grow into the old leaves as they slowly degrade forming a humus rich soil.....