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Bulb Log Diary

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BULB LOG 09.....13th September 2023



Codonopsis grey-wilsonii



Codonopsis grey-wilsonii generally flowers in mid to late August and it is an indicator to me that the season is changing from the summer to the autumn flowering plants. This one is twining up the stem of a digitalis growing at the edge of the bed beside the pond where I spotted the very first of the autumn flowering crocus flowering among a carpet of *Geranium robertianum* foliage. Soon I hope many more crocuses will flower here and I have a decision whether to remove the low growing geranium foliage, whose shade has helped retain moisture in the ground, or allow the crocus to flower among it. These are the decisions that gardeners have to make especially in a garden like

ours where we work in harmony with nature. Regular rainfall through this summer has had the result that the foliage on many plants is still growing. The growth of *Uvularia grandiflora* has not been driven back to an early dormancy like it has in the last few hot dry years and it is partially hiding the emerging *Cyclamen hederifolium* flowers giving me another decision to take. The *Cyclamen* flowers will flower whether I cut the *Uvularia* back or not so it is more a matter of



aesthetics and I will probably choose a compromise by bending some of the *Uvularia* stems to reveal more of the cyclamen with cutting back to a minimum.



Another plant that has benefited from the moister summer conditions is **Eucomis bicolor** which is displaying stronger growth than it has for a few years. This is a South African plant that has evolved with summer rain fall.



Eucomis bicolor grows happily with many plants including the spring and autumn flowering bulbs and it is from such combinations and associations of plants growing together that I get most pleasure.



The next two close images show another **Codonopsis grey-wilsoni** twining up through the lower branches of a large Rhododendron with **Roscoeia 'Harvington Imperial'** (below) growing in front of it but you do not get that information from a close up picture which is why I also like to use wider views showing the context of the plants.





Here you can see the roscoea in front of the Rhododendron with a Codonopsis flower just visible peeking out from behind the **Roscoea 'Harvington Imperial'**. This Roscoea is one of the most reliable in our garden and it is also growing well in this year's abundant summer moisture.



Here it is again dominating the scene behind the smaller **Roscoea 'Red Gurkha'**.

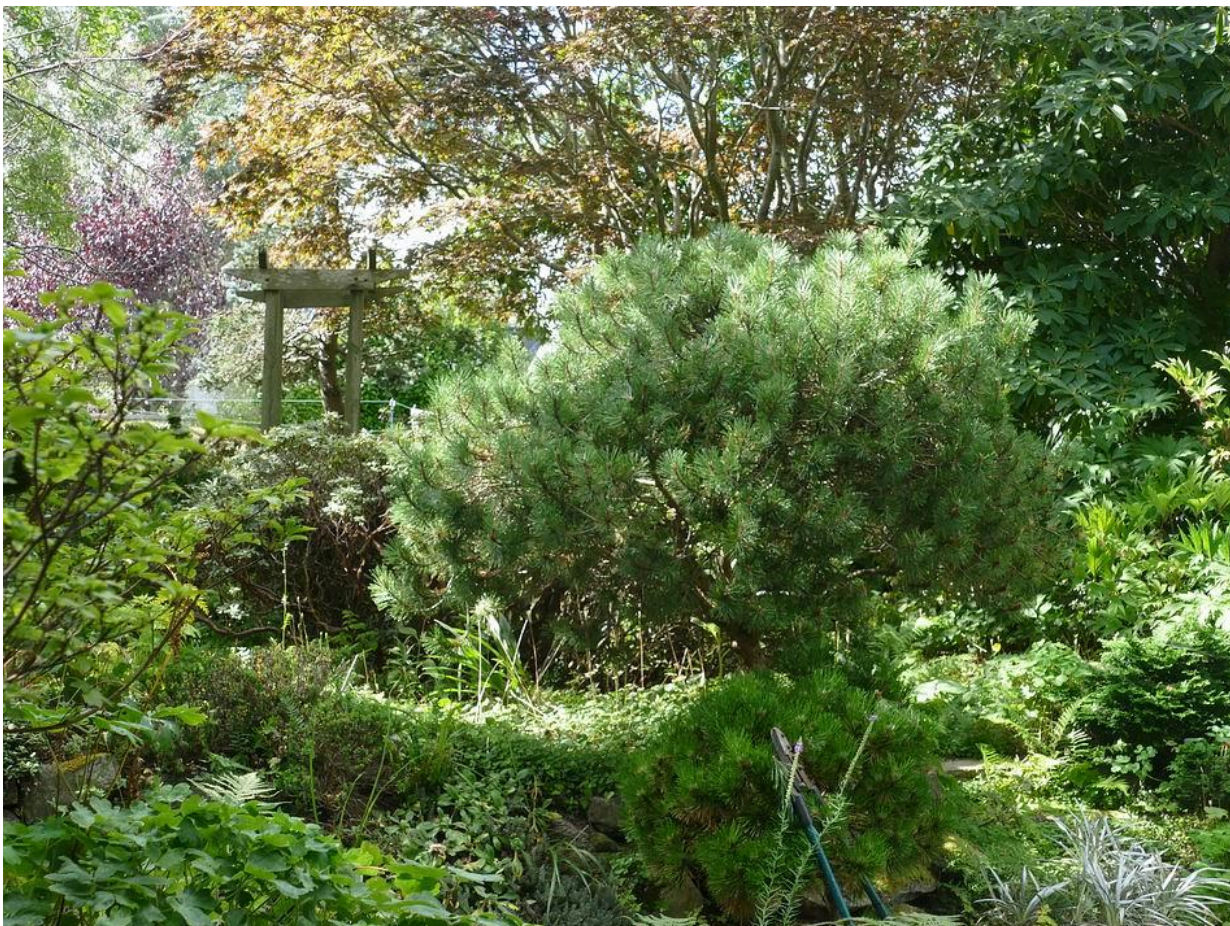


Veratrum fimbriatum gets bigger and more dramatic every year and brings flowering interest into the shady zone under Acers and Rhododendrons.





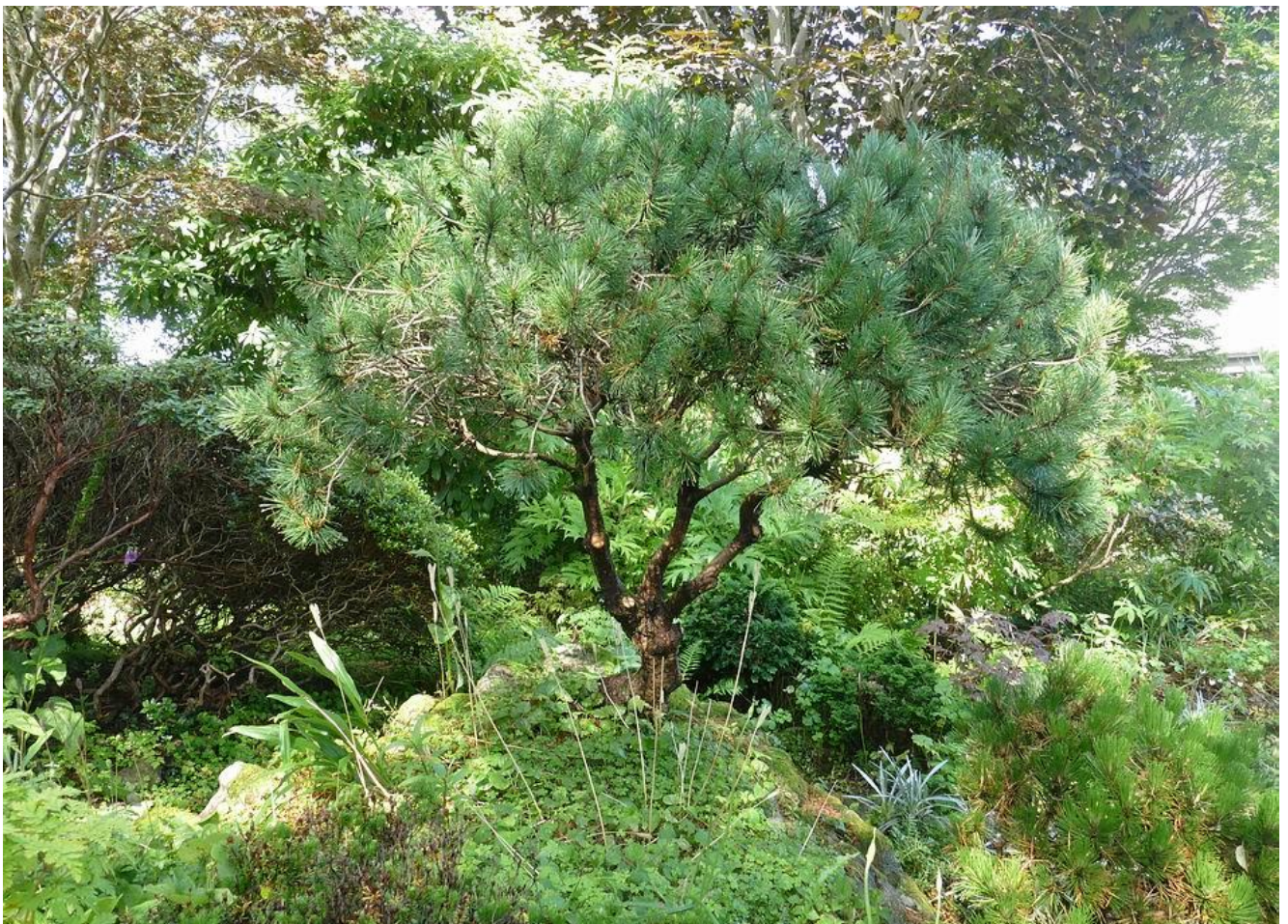
When we start out gardening we seek out many plants, doing everything we can to encourage them to grow and bulk up but then there comes a gradual switch as the garden matures to the point where some of the growth now needs to be slowed down, cut back or even removed. We have two pines growing on the raised wall and after forty years, despite being candle pruned annually to keep them compact, their canopies are now spreading too much so they need to be cut back.



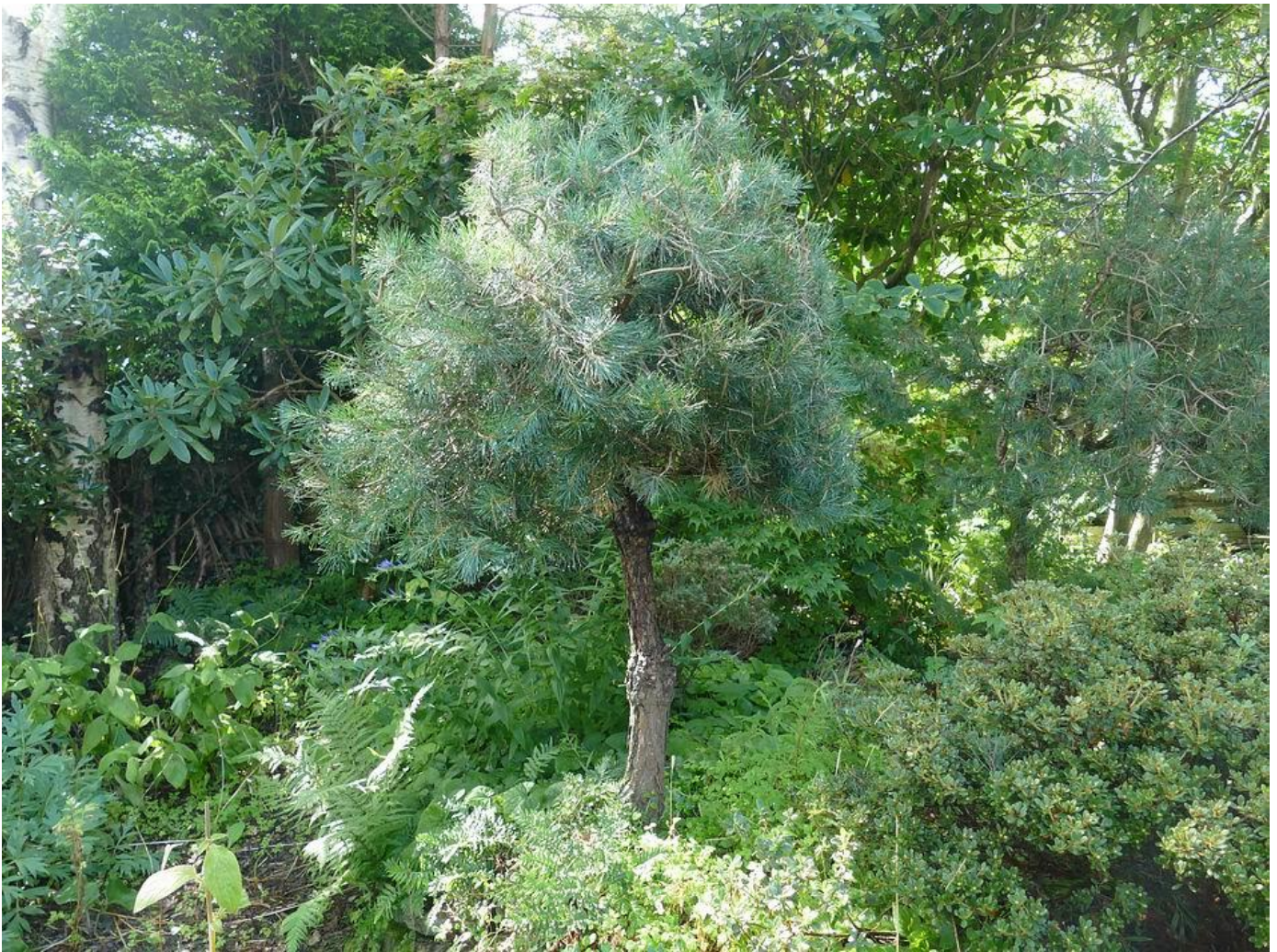
The crown on this pine has been raised a few times over its forty plus year lifetime but as its growth spreads out the canopy drops again to the point it is now casting too much shade on the habitats below, where I have established a colony of (Pseudo)trillium rivale among other plants, so drastic action is once more necessary.



The tools come out and I start cutting back slowly; always standing back to check how it looks, remembering that what is cut off cannot be put back.



The canopy is now both raised and lighter and I will do some more pruning among the active green growth to try and encourage budding back which is not always successful with pine trees.



The other pine has always been a bit of a lollipop shape so I have given it a good cut back. In my experience pines will not produce buds from old growth where there are no needles growing but I will watch for any signs of budding back as I try and keep these trees in scale to fit in with the other plants around it while still looking good.

If we cannot keep the canopy of the pines compact enough while also looking appropriate and attractive then eventually we may have to take the decision to remove them.

The prunings are not wasted having been shredded, and this will be used as a mulch.





After forty years of growth the 'dwarf' rhododendrons are not so small - their growth is up to 1.2 metres high and even wider. The spread of growth extended out almost blocking off a narrow path so over the year I have cut some branches back and removed some of the old wood lower down, which had died due to lack of light.



Unlike the pines many rhododendrons, especially these small leaved types, will bud back on old wood. Removing some branches allowed enough light back in to stimulate adventitious buds at the base of the plant where there is now a mass of new growth. I am encouraged to gradually cut more back rejuvenating this bed.



Removing the dead twigs and some branches has allowed more light plenty into the centre of the bed which is stimulating new growth right down to the bases and the brave thing to do would be to cut them all down to almost ground level. Decisions, decisions! I am not sure I am ready for such an extreme change yet.



Troughs and slab beds.



Cyananthus lobatus hybrid

The emergence of masses of blue flowers on this large sprawling Cyananthus lobatus hybrid plant is another indicator that the summer is coming to an end and it will continue to flower sporadically until the frosts send the plant into a winter dormancy.



This second picture is to show how all the flowers, no matter where they are on the plant, face in the same direction, North West.



More late summer blues include **Cyananthus microphyllus** and **Gentiana asclepiadea**(below).





The seeds on this **Hypericum reptans** have become even more precious to me this year after we lost a number of plants - a direct effect of the climate change we are all experiencing. I mentioned in a recent Bulb Log how we had lost all but a few plants from which I will collect and sow the seed carefully as soon as it is ripe.



In addition to the plant shown above a self-sown seeding of *Hypericum reptans* grows here in the narrow gap between the paving slabs that cover this area.

I like to have plants that are attractive to pollinators in the garden and so often it is not the big showy flowers that the insects are drawn to most but the plants with a succession of small flowers such as **Scabosia columbaria 'Nana'**.

Many of the native or naturalised plants, often considered weedy, such as the orange Hawkweed shown below attract the constant attention of pollinators especially when the sun is shining.



***Pilosella aurantiaca* (Orange Hawkweed)**



Last month when I wrote the Bulb Log I had *Tanacetum* on my mind and mistakenly used that name for this Ragwort however my slip was soon pointed out by a Forum Member and I quickly corrected myself and the Bulb Log with the correct name which is of course ***Senecio jacobaea***.

Most of the plants in our garden arrived by seed. Some were blown in on the wind but most are introduced intentionally as we sow the seeds, however very occasionally, we visit a garden centre. A few weeks ago we did just that where we bought some of the late flowering golden daisy-like plants that will fit in with our plantings.

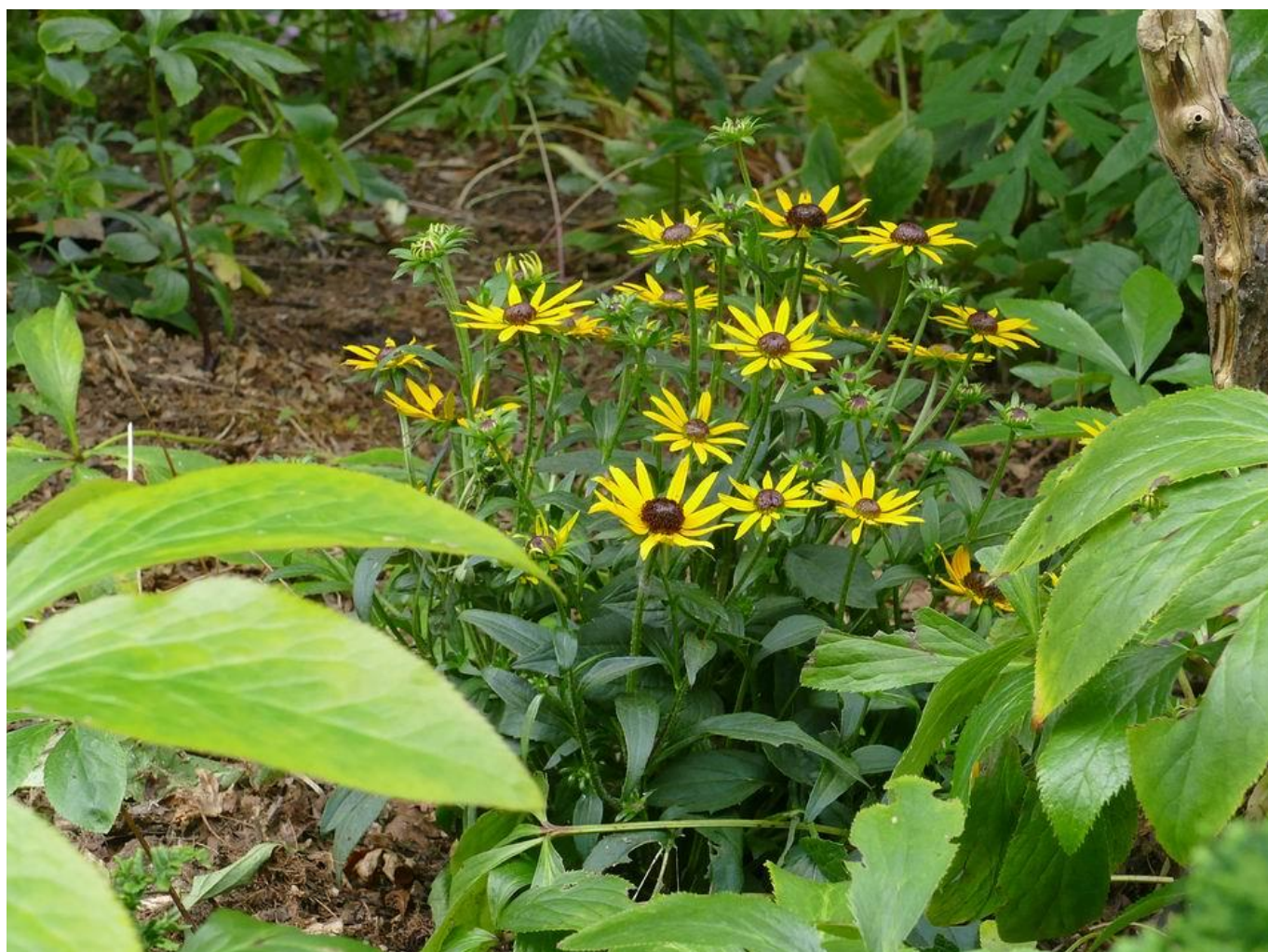
Helenium autumnale





Helenium hoopesii

My hope is that will get seed from the two Helenium but I am not so sure if the cultivar Rudbeckia 'Little Goldstar' below will set seed.



***Rudbeckia* 'Little Goldstar'**



Can you spot the two *Heleniums* now at home among the wild planting of our garden where we hope they will thrive.



These *Allium wallichii* seedling around the paths along with *Pilosella aurantiaca* are at their most dramatic when they are illuminated by the low morning light.



Now for the three of the most useful groups of autumn flowering bulbs that for the next few months will delight us in the garden starting with some **Cyclamen hederifolium**.



I like seeing them best not as isolated specimens but growing among other plants in the wildness of our garden.



Cyclamen hederifolium



Autumn flowering Crocus are also coming into bloom with flowers popping up in a range of habitats around the garden



There is beauty in the crocus flowers even when they are not perfect.



A number of the plants featured this month can be seen in this wider view looking up part of the garden.



Autumn flowering **Colchicum** cultivars put on a display with a **Veratrum fimbriatum** in the background. Perfect specimen plants growing with the ground around them kept 'weed free' and clear, is but a collection of plants – plants growing in and among each other makes it into a garden.



These Colchicum cultivars with Eucomis bicolor in the background and Cyclamen hiding in the grasses will soon be joined by the Crocus flowers to complete the autumn scene.



Colchicum cultivar

Regular readers may be wondering why the 1st September has past and I have not mentioned the first autumn storm. Well all the bulbs are re-potted and ready to receive the first soaking of the new bulb year but it has been very hot so I delayed it. This morning there was a real autumnal chill in the air and the first shoots are already poking through the gravel on some of the pots so the storm will come this week. All the details of our bulb growing regime can be read in [The Bulb Log back catalogue](#) where I have described it every one of the last 20 years. Now with the monthly Bulb Log I am concentrating more on the garden and leave you with one more image of the Colchicums.