



SRGC

Bulb Log Diary

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BULB LOG 10.....18th October 2023





September and October brings the season when we enjoy some autumn flowering bulbs. In our garden these are mostly represented by Crocus, Colchicum and Cyclamen, all of which delight us with a succession of flowers for weeks. Over the years we built up a collection of many different species, some of which needed the protection of the bulb house to survive, but as I get older I am more interested in the ones that grow, flower and seed around the garden on their own so we have a range of these species and forms that are naturalising across the garden.

The artist in me seeks to work in partnership with nature forming various habitats in an environment that gives me the impression that I could be walking in a landscape rather than being in just an urban garden. Drawing on plants from across the world, from trees down to bulbs, the garden has an atmosphere like that of a small woodland scattered with various openings and rocky habitats. It is far from what many would think of as the perfect garden because the plants are jumbled together giving a rather chaotic look at times, which is exactly what I have learned to appreciate by observing nature. On the show benches we expect to see 'perfect' plants - in other words when exhibited they should be unblemished - but my idea of perfection is more based on looking natural where things are rarely unblemished and so it is in our garden where I can observe the plants subjected to the vagaries of the weather and nibbled on by the wildlife as they go through their annual growth cycle.

The first series of images are of a succession of Crocus flowering in the cobble bed. The flowers are subject to being knocked over by strong winds or felled when a slug chews through the slender floral tube that holds the flower aloft. Even when lying on the ground the flowers continue to open and close in any warmth we get. Each corm will also send up a succession of flowers to replace the fallen ones.





The autumn flowering Crocus that grow and increase well for us in our cool wet northern garden include the species *kotschyanus*, *pulchellus*, *speciosus*, *nudiflorus*, *banaticus* and *vallicola*. The first three species I have listed have hybridised producing a swarm of fertile garden hybrids that also seed around.



Although some flowers may just last a few days the succession of blooms from the different forms and species ensure it is not a short season. Four weeks on from the opening pictures the later flowering white *speciosus* hybrids take their turn on the cobble bed stage.



I am really pleased with this new plant to the garden, **Rudbeckia 'Little Goldstar'**, that we added in August, it seems to have settled in well. Its colourful flowers are lasting a long time which makes me suspect that like many garden cultivars it may not set any viable seed but I will continue to hope.



This crocus will be familiar to regular readers as it has appeared annually in these pages since it first flowered. It shows when plants are allowed to seed around they often plant themselves in unlikely places such as in this gap between the slabs.



It started from a single seed that accidentally fell into the narrow gap and every year we get more flowers than the year before. This is the second wave of flowers with the remains of the previous blooms lying on the ground.



It is one of the fertile garden hybrids I mentioned earlier.



At this time of year this small *Erythronium* plunge is taken over by *Crocus* and *Colchicum*.



It started out when I sunk a plunge basket of *Crocus nudiflorus* 'Orla' in with the erythroniums. From that small base this white form of *Crocus nudiflorus* has spread out by stolons and seed which is evident in the range of colours. Over the years the colony has expanded across the gravel path into the other plunge.



Most of the *Crocus nudiflorus* seeds resulted in the typical violet colour there are also a number of white clones.



You may also spot some *Crocus speciosus* have seeded in and I have no idea how the *Colchicum*, which first appeared several years ago, got in there.

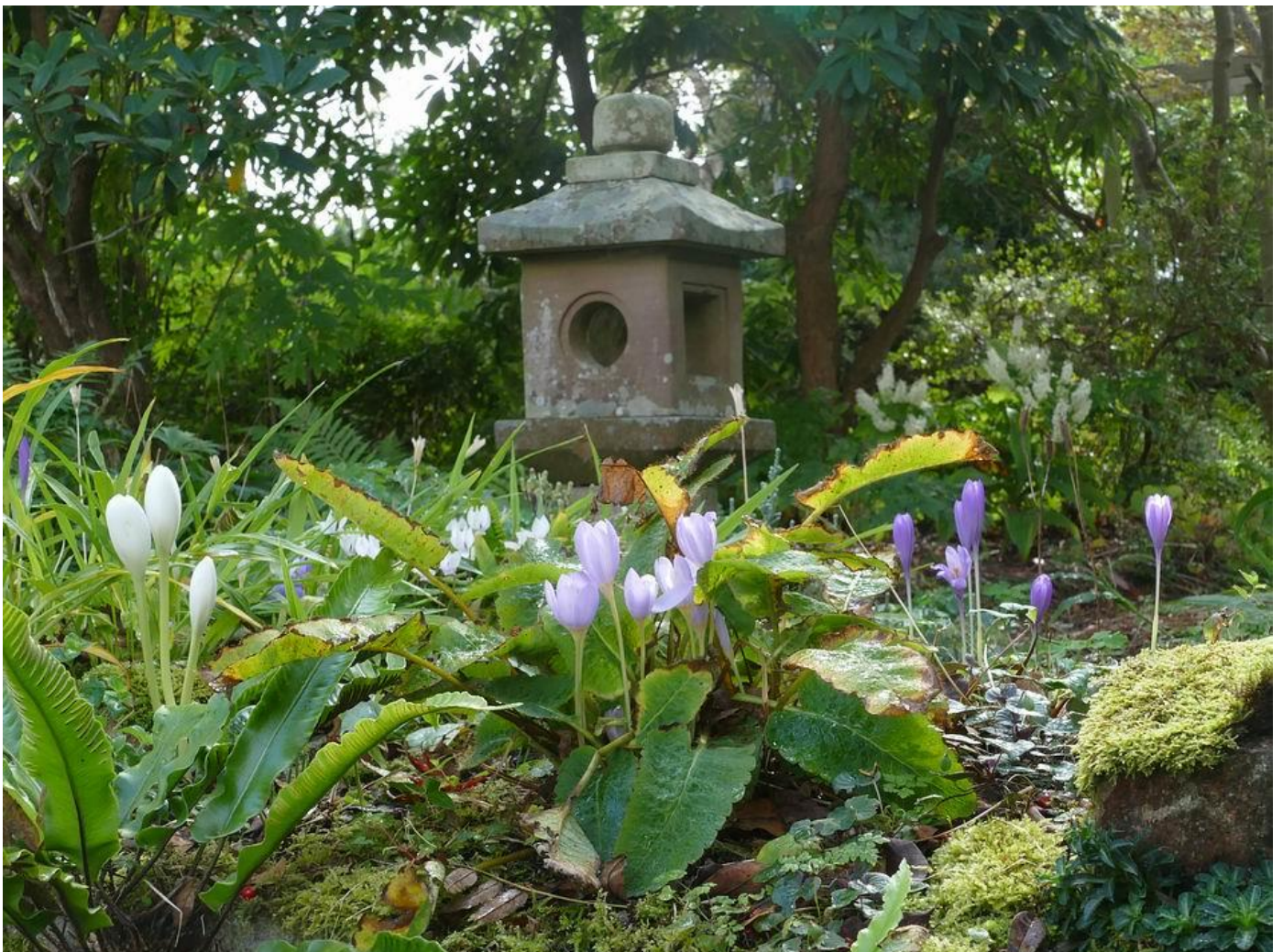


My delight is not in a 'perfect' clump of flowers but of plants growing in mixed communities. Many are formed naturally as the plants self-seed, resulting in them growing through each other in ways that I would never think of.





The following selection of images is to show some of the associations that these autumn flowering bulbs make.



Crocus, Colchicum and Cyclamen flowering among the leaves of Meconopsis, Roscoea and ferns.



I have observed that we get a better seed set on the autumn flowering crocus than on those that flower in the spring. I put this down to the fact that we often get warm sunny weather and more pollinating insects in the autumn than we do in the spring. Even though they flower now the seed will ripen at the same time as their spring relatives.



It is not just pollinators that are attracted to the flowers, other, perhaps less welcome fauna leave their mark as they feed on the flowers.



Slightly battered and chewed these Colchicum and Crocus flowers rise through a jungle of Roscoea leaves like the Cyclamen below, growing nearby.



It is unplanned groupings where plants have seeded around such as these Crocus and Cyclamen growing through the Roscoea foliage that appeal to me the most.



While I like to leave the old withering growth of plants to die back naturally I do occasionally trim it back in some areas so we can see the autumn flowering bulbs better, such as I did here to enjoy these Colchicum.



I also cleared away some of the taller old foliage so we can see plants like this **Cyclamen hederifolium**.



Plants have no respect for our paths in fact more plants seed into the gravel sections of the paths than anywhere else in the garden. Here another group of Crocus flowers have to be carefully stepped over as I walk around.



Autumn flowering *Crocus* hybrids.



Autumn flowering *Colchicum speciosum album*



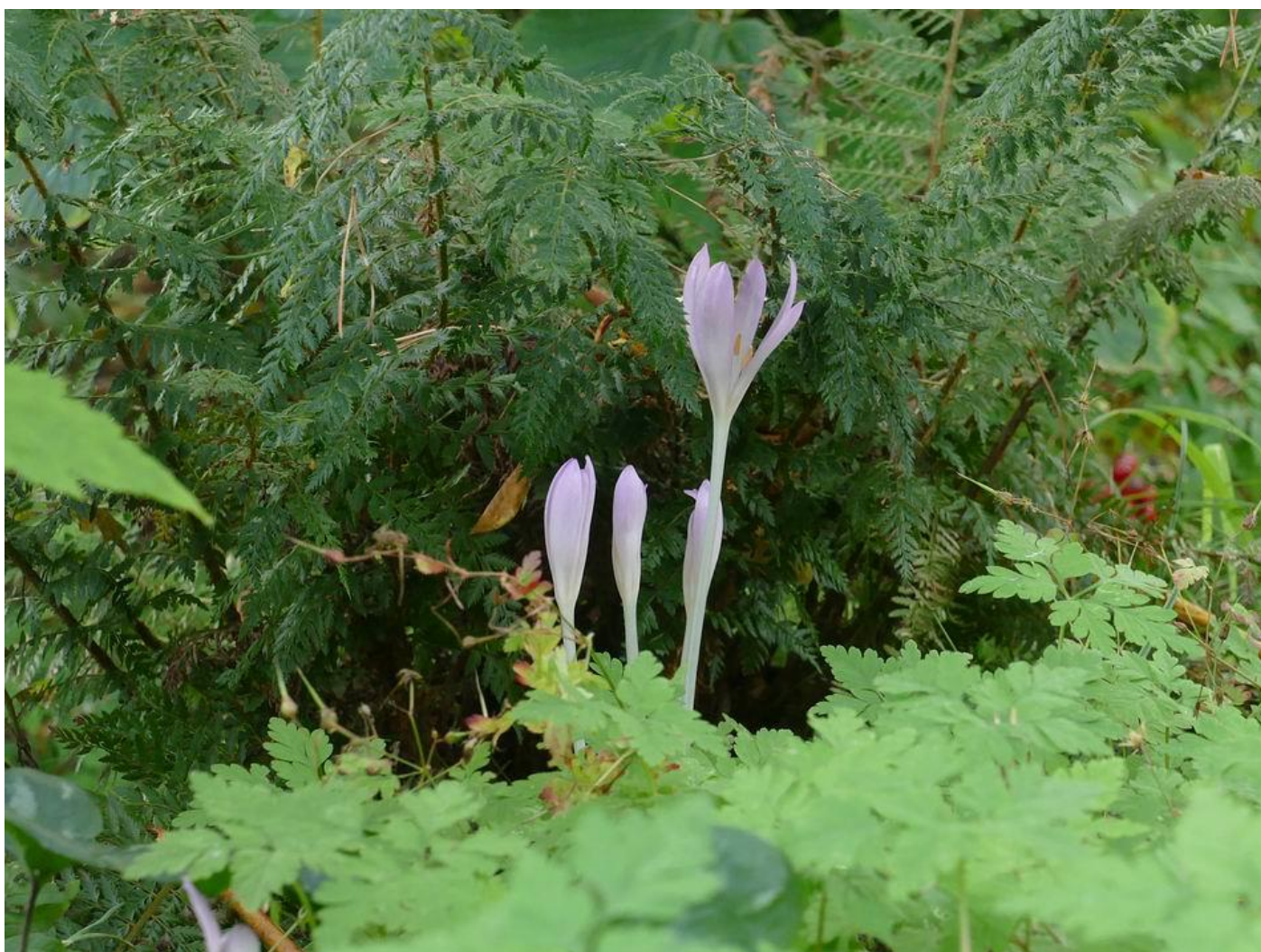
Relatively pristine **Colchicum speciosum album** flowers push up through the dried remains of now dormant plants that have utilised this space through the spring and summer.



A few days on these flowers, ravaged by weather and slightly chewed, still perfectly display the season to me.



The following images show more of the *Colchicum* flowering in a range of habitats which are far from unblemished but perfectly illustrating the autumn season in the garden.





Autumn flowering **Colchicum 'Pink Star'** formerly went under the name *Colchicum laetum*





Crocus pulchellus



Mostly **Crocus banaticus**, flowering in the bed beside the pond.



In this bed the crocus usually grow through a freshly applied mulch of pine needles but for a change this year I decided to try allowing the **Crocus banaticus** to flower through a low growing green carpet of *Geranium robertianum*. It was only when I was recording the latest [Bulb Log](#) [Video Diary](#) that I spotted that this white flower was not *Crocus vallicola* or *nudiflorus albus*,

both of which also grow in the bed, but was a white form of *Crocus banaticus*.



In the past we have tried and lost various white forms of this species, **Crocus banaticus albus**, but this one has appeared in this bed as a natural variation among the self-seeded plants. I hope it will survive and increase.



There is a huge variation in the structure of flowers that we should take the time to study. The Roscoea flowers, shown here, as the selection 'Red Gurkha', are fascinating and you will be rewarded if you look in detail at the structure of their flowers so you can understand how the pollination process works as I showed in [Bulb Log 3520](#).



**Tanacetum
parthenium
(Feverfew).**

Some flowers appear simpler such as those of the daisy family where the reproductive parts are all contained in the central boss surrounded by the ray florets which combine to make them a most attractive flower.

If you ask a child to draw a flower it is most likely to look like a daisy, or perhaps a pansy.

This child loves daisy flowers and in addition to my photographs they also often feature in my artworks as in the example below.

Like so many artists my work thrives on accidental marks that I can respond to and work with.

The evolution of life itself depends on accidents, all the way down to genetic level, creating the incredible range of life on our planet.



My art work is much like the garden far from pristine often employing unconventional materials and methods combined and layered up to create an expression of what is around me.



Allium wallichii is another autumn flowering bulb that thrives in our conditions.



This autumn flowering onion especially likes seeding into the gravel parts of the paths and they take the place of all the erythroniums that make walking the paths difficult in the spring.



Crocus pulchellus



Crocus banaticus



Crocus speciosus



Crocus speciosus



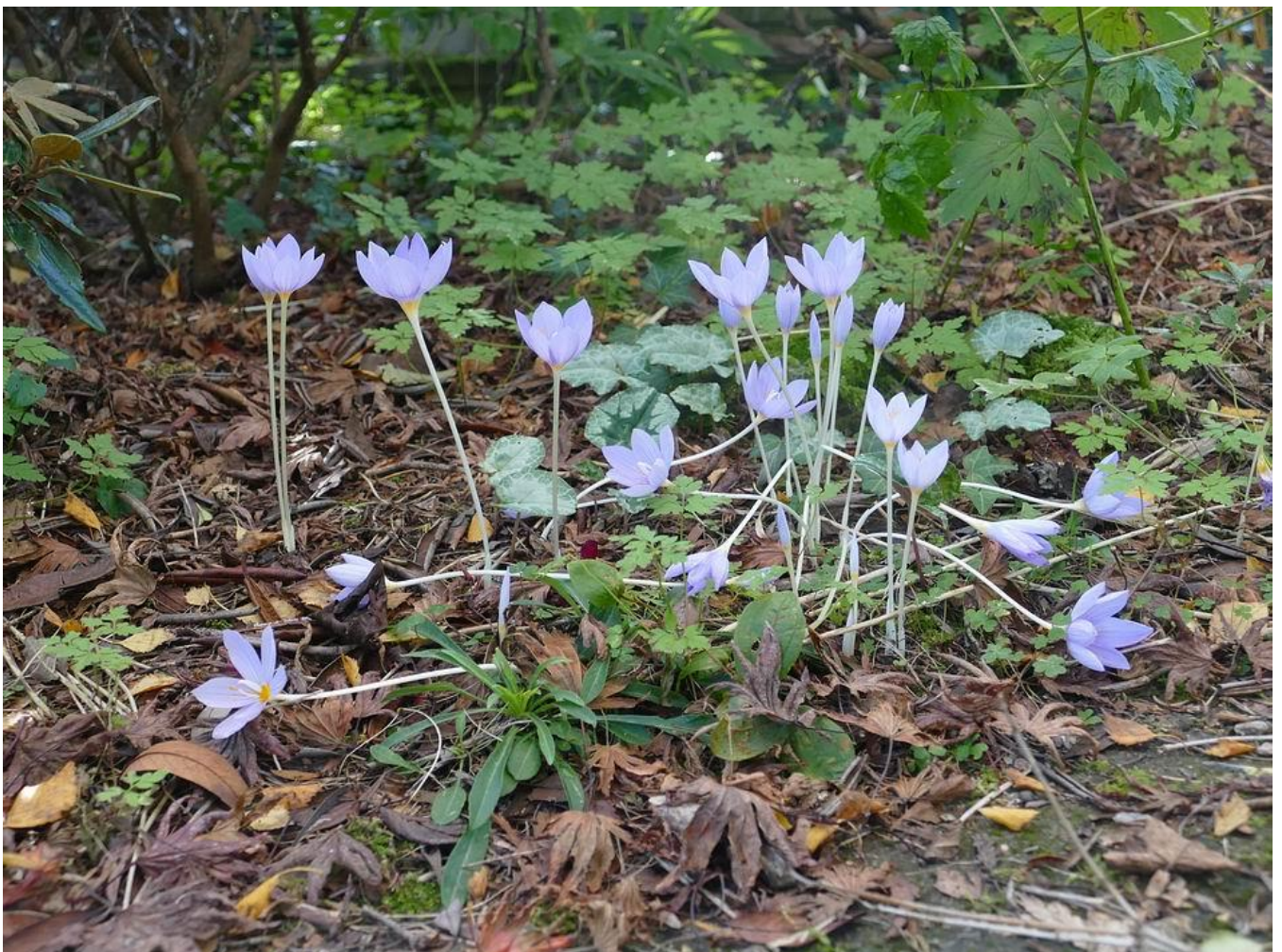
Crocus speciosus



The best moments are created by the combinations of plants growing together such as **Crocus speciosus** with **Eucomis tricolor**.



Cyclamen hederifolium



Crocus pulchellus



Colchicum cultivar



Colchicum flowers bend over as they reach for the light in an attempt to get out of the shade.



Allium wallichii seedheads stand out majestically in the low autumn light.



Crocus speciosus

Autumn is a season of decay when many plants shed their annual leaves and herbaceous growth dies down as we head into winter. One group of plants, the autumn flowering bulbs, take advantage of the lack of competition by flowering early to attract the many pollinators that are about at this time of year. Yes, they are often described as the 'late flowering bulbs' but in the growth cycle of the bulbs and corms they flower early; it is the majority that protect their flower buds within the bulb until they emerge to bloom in the spring that are the late risers.

Walk with me as I look at the Crocus, Colchicum and Cyclamen in this late September [Bulb Log Video Diary](#).