



Hoverflies on Giant Lily flower

This is definitely the week of the hoverflies – I cannot remember ever seeing so many of them. They are all over the garden, swarming around any plant that is in flower. Above they are feasting on the copious amounts of pollen produced on the anthers of some large hybrid lilies.



Hoverflies on Babiana odorata

In a smaller scale here they are enjoying the flowers on this Babiana odorata.



Crocus nudiflorus

I counted as many as seven hoverflies in one *Crocus nudiflorus* flower but I could not get a suitable photograph of that event however above is one with three. There is no danger of these flowers not being well pollinated and if the weather stays reasonable we should have a very good seed set on the flowers that are out just now. Hoverflies are very beneficial to gardeners not just for the pollination service but the nymph stage of these flies are voracious eaters of aphids.

Trillium erectum x flexipes seedpods

I showed these beautiful shiny bright coloured seed pods a few logs back when they were still ripening on the plants.

This week I noticed that the first one had fallen from the plant so I collected them all. Many *Trilliums* behave in this way where, much like a falling autumn leaf, the abscission layer at the end of the pedicle releases the pod.





To clean the seed I first squash the fruits between layers of newspaper – that breaks them up and absorbs much of the excess liquid. Then using a kitchen sieve I wash them under running water which cleans them further but they remain in a stick mass of seed and pulp. The final stage of cleaning is to mix them with some fine dry sand: rubbing this mixture with my fingers leaves me with nice clean seeds with just the eliasome attached. This white fleshy attachment is what attracts insects such as wasps and ants to distribute the seeds and I have read that some people think if it remains attached it inhibits the germination of the seeds. I would not have the time to perform the fiddly task of removing them from the small seeds and from my experience I have never had any problems germinating fresh trillium seeds.



Sown Trillium Seeds

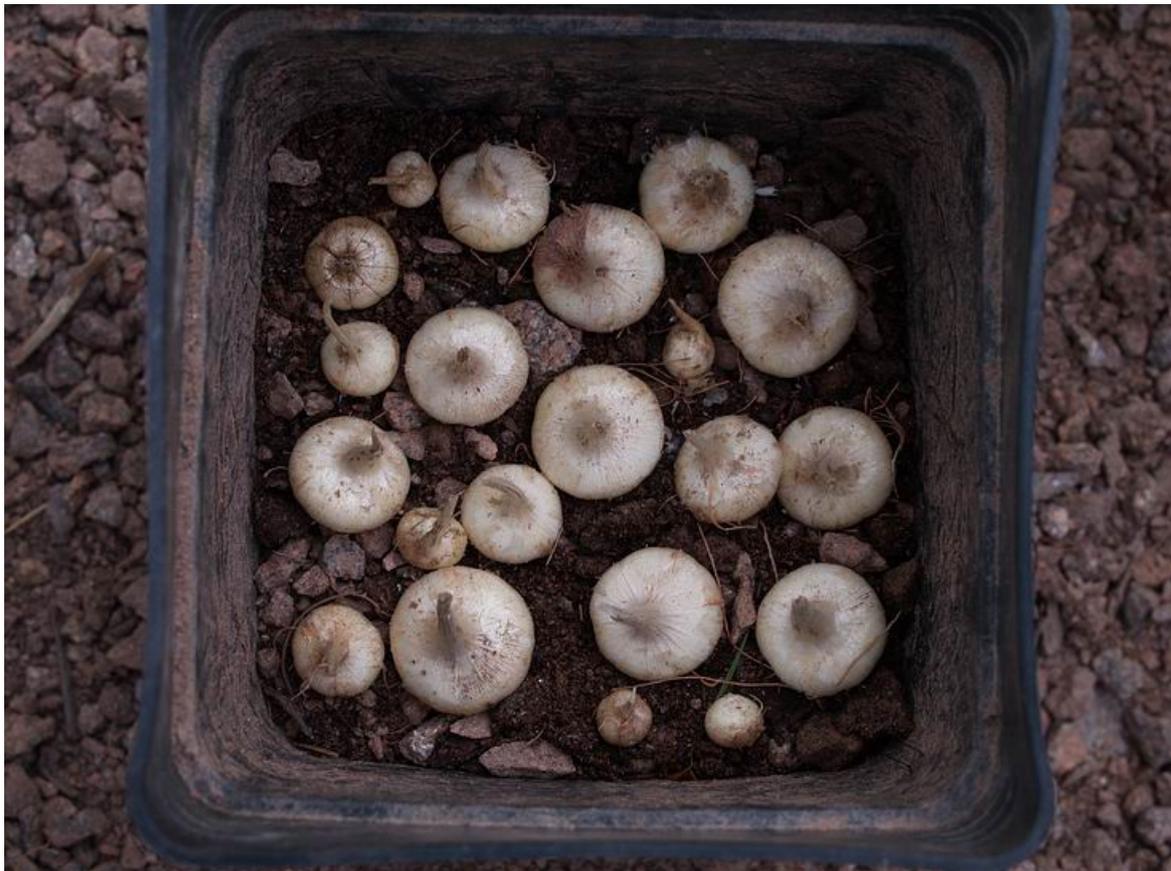


I do not bother removing the dry sand from the now clean Trillium seeds – I just scatter it all onto the surface of the seed pot. Finally I cover the seed with around 1cm of gravel then place it into an open seed frame where it will both remain moist and be subjected to fluctuating periods of freezing and thawing over the winter months; an essential process for germination of many Trilliums. It may be Spring 2011 before I get any seed leaves appearing above the gravel as the first stage of germination that will take place in 2010 forms a root and the young rhizome – a further period of fluctuating temperatures is then required before the seed leaves appear. I have had the odd seed leaf appear in the first spring after sowing.



Tecophilaea corms

I am now spending as much time as possible repotting the bulbs under glass before I soak them in September. I am working through the Crocus and Narcissus first leaving the frits until last as they can be left dry for that bit longer. Above are Tecophilaea cyanocrocus corms showing good growth with each corm having produced an offset as well as replacing itself with a nice flowering sized corm. Tecophilaea corms are like Crocus in that they only last for one year and a new corm will form just above the previous one; if they are growing well, smaller offsets can also form. I have had as many as four offsets on a single corm but that was an exceptionally good result.



Tecophilaea corms cleaned and planted

One of the dilemmas when repotting bulbs is whether to remove the tunics or leave them on. I tend towards removing all the excess tunics as a precaution to prevent them retaining excessive moisture around the corm which can cause rotting. I am sure that in the wild the old corms serve that very purpose of preventing them from drying out excessively by trapping moisture but when cultivating them in pots that moisture can become a problem.



Tecophilaea corms with rot

Rot on *Tecophilaea* corms is the main cause of failure that I get - but luckily I do not experience a lot of it just a hand full of corms out of a hundred or so. The rot always starts at the base of the new corm where it is attached to the shrivelling remains of the previous year's one and spreads up from that point. I do not discard these corms but pot them up and grow them on much like the healthy ones, only keeping the pot slightly on the dry side. Many will not succumb completely to the rot and I usually find some small healthy corms have formed by next summer even though there may have been no top growth.



Crocus scharojanii flavus

When I repotted *Crocus scharojanii flavus* a few weeks ago the shots and roots were already developing but careful handling have done it no harm as these beautiful flowers will show.



Above you can see a **Pot of Narcissus bulbs** which were not repotted last year but were instead top dressed with a sprinkle of bone meal. My ideal to achieve the best results from your bulbs is to repot every year where possible; you can get away with repotting every second year with few setbacks if you provide additional nutrients such as bone meal and then potash. The pot above shows a lot of roots coming through the drainage holes seeking nutrients and water in the sand below



When the bulbs are removed from the pot you can see the extensive root system plus some first year seedlings near the top. These are stray seedlings that self sowed from some Narcissus that I missed collecting the seeds from last year and are another good reason to repot every year to prevent contamination of your pots with strays.



First year Narcissus seedlings

When ever I am repotting I always remove any first year seedling bulbs – unless I have recorded on the label that I sowed them last season – to minimise the chances of having pots of mixed progeny.



Healthy Narcissus Bulbs

These are the cleaned off bulbs from the above pot all ready to be replanted back into nice fresh compost.

Planting Narcissus

When I am repotting the bulbs I try and place all the flowering sized ones well spaced around the pot correctly orientated in an upright position but when it comes to the smaller ones I just scatter them around leaving them as they fall.

It does not matter if they land on their side or even upside down as they will still grow on perfectly well.

Just think of the small offsets that often appear coming out sideways from the base of the parent bulb; they manage perfectly well.



Narcissus bulbs

This is a pot that I planted last year in the way shown above and you will see that the bulbs that fell on their sides are still perfectly happy and still on their sides. Narcissus are true bulbs and do not replace themselves each year they just add to the layers.

Fritillaria bulbs and corms such as Crocus and Tecophilaea all replace themselves annually and will always re-orientate themselves to the upright position after one year's growth no matter which way up they were planted.





Bad result

Not every pot holds good news as every year I have failures as well as successes. It would appear that while a couple of the Narcissus bulbs in this pot are fine the others have rotted away leaving only the ghost of the bulb as evidence of their existence.



Cleaned bulbs

Once I had cleaned the bulbs by gently rubbing them between the palms of my hands to remove the outer loose layer of the skin the true and unhappy state of the bulbs was revealed.

I suspect that it is more than just wet rot that has caused this loss and that one of the various rot diseases which affect narcissus bulbs has been present. This is another and the most important reason to try and repot your bulbs every year – the health check. This alerts me to any problems of disease and or bad culture and allows me to take the relevant steps. I disposed of these bulbs and look on the positive side – that is I now have space for one more pot. I do not use any chemicals to

tackle these diseases but work on the organic system of trying to keep the bulbs healthy and able to fight off such attacks themselves by being well nourished, without being overfed, with all the trace and essential elements necessary and getting my cultivation correct – mainly regarding the watering. I also believe that my use of leafmould in the potting mix will provide some beneficial pathogens that will help the combat the bad ones.



Successful pot full of bulbs

It is never good to finish on a bad note: just like they say when you fall off a horse, the best thing to do is to get straight back on it so I never stop my day's repotting on a poor result, I keep going until I reach a good success like the pot above. Fortunately success far out numbers the failures but always remember that the so-called experts are those people who have probably lost most plants. The important thing is to try and understand why you failed, learn the lesson and take the appropriate actions to prevent it happening again.



Finally I could not resist one more picture of the hover flies.