



BULB LOG 45.....11th November 2009



Fading Crocus flower

This is a *Crocus caspius* flower that is now past its best and starting to wither. I wanted to illustrate one of the difficulties you will experience in cold damp conditions and that is grey mould which in this flower is forming on the pollen. Removal of the dead flowers as soon as they collapse will help keep the mould from becoming a serious issue. At last now the rain has stopped and we are having some bright sunny days however with the clear skies comes hard frosts so most of the bulbs will grow more slowly now.



Ornithogalum leaves

Although it will be some months before these *Ornithogalum* come into flower their leaves are well developed and will not grow much more.

I need to ensure that they do not dry out as that would cause harm to both the leaves and roots. On the other hand I do not want them sitting too wet as that can cause problems with wet rot attacking the bulbs and stems. As water conducts frost more quickly through the compost it is best not to be watering too much when heavy frosts are forecast.

There is a fine line between getting the watering just right and completely wrong at this time of the year.



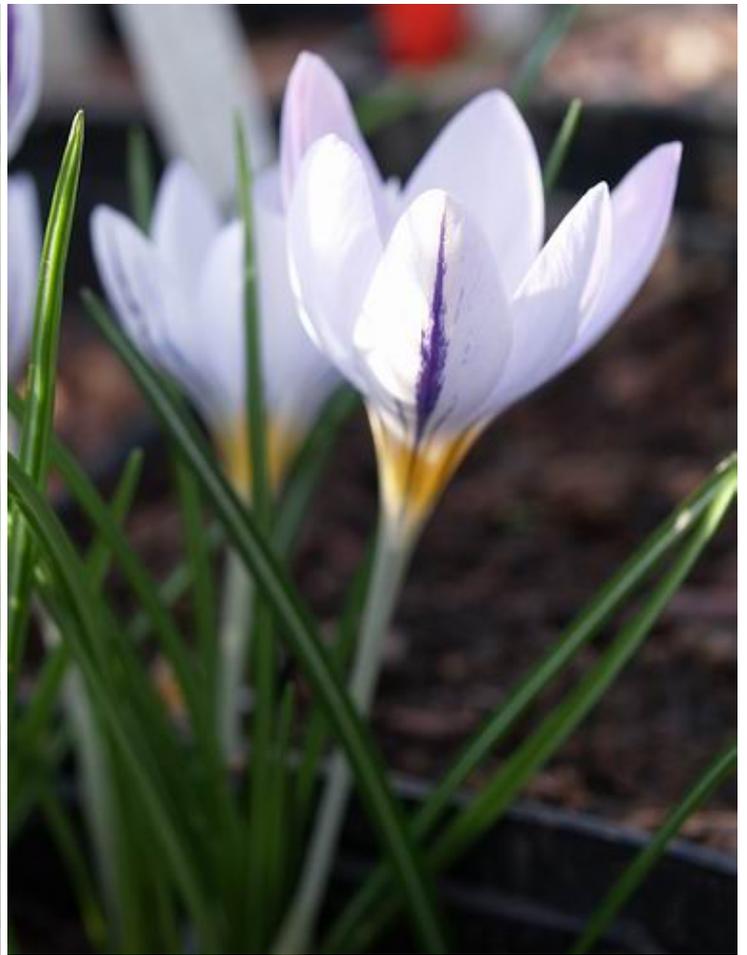
Cyclamen persicum leaves and seedlings

In the centre foreground of this picture you will see some small leaves that are the results of self sown seedlings - I must have missed collecting a seedpod from this *Cyclamen persicum*.



Crocus laevigatus

Last week I showed pictures looking into the open flowers of *Crocus laevigatus* and this week I will show the outside with the varying degrees of dark violet feathering. The background colour of the floral segments also varies and these display a relatively deep colour.



Crocus laevigatus

Two more show that the feathering can be extensive or simply a stripe up the centre. Some flowers can be almost completely white without any feathering at all but I have not raised any of those yet – besides I like the ones with a deep background colour and extensive feathering the best.



Crocus niveus

Telling similar looking species apart is often a problem and last week I mentioned *Crocus niveus* and *C. hadriaticus* as two that sometimes get confused in cultivation.



Crocus hadriaticus leaves

Telling plants apart is a bit like identifying our friends and families. There are many factors that allow us to tell the difference between our friends even those that look very similar, like sisters. We do not just use the hard physical features in isolation but in conjunction with the movements and mannerisms that define the individual. When asked to identify these sisters purely from a photograph, without the benefit of the mannerisms it is not always

so easy - I find it is the same with plants. There is often something about a flower, the way it opens or holds itself perhaps, that is difficult to quantify but is clearly recognisable. This is the case with *Crocus niveus* and *Crocus hadriaticus*. One feature that is defined and usually helps is that the leaves of *Crocus hadriaticus* are usually sheathed well above the ground by the bracts and prophyll as the picture above demonstrates. There is another important sense that helps in identification of the individual and that is scent. Perhaps it is not used in taxonomy very often because it can be very subjective and there is no clear scale to measure it against – although modern science has its methods and being a most important factor in attracting pollinators it is a major evolutionary dynamic. I find that *Crocus hadriaticus* has a strong sweet scent while *Crocus niveus* has only a faint slightly bitter scent that I describe as a ‘green’ scent and there is the problem. How many of you understand what I mean as a ‘green’ scent?



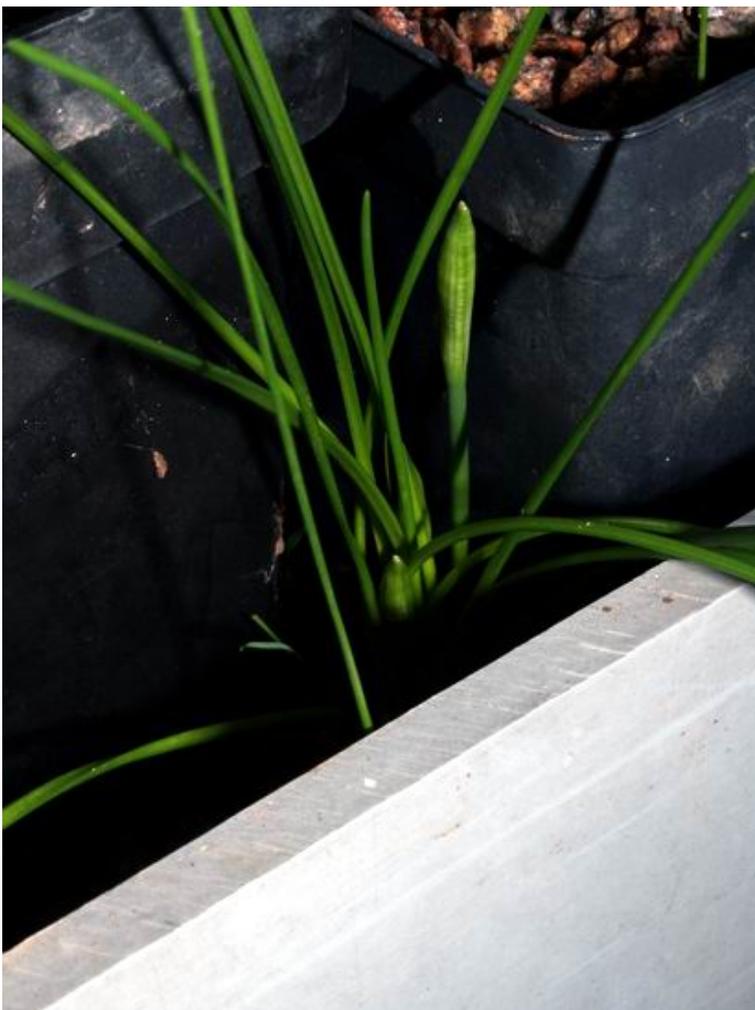
Narcissus seed germinating

I am now finding that just as the first of the winter flowering Narcissus are starting to bloom some of the Narcissus seeds are also germinating. This is one that had fallen onto the sand plunge so it was easily lifted to see how it develops. Notice that there is only a very short ‘stem’ between the seed case and the point where the root emerges - that is where the bulb will form. This seed was just lying on the surface and so the young bulb would be barely covered for its first year leaving it vulnerable to excessive drying out and predation - that is why I recommend that you sow your Narcissus seeds deeply – to better protect the young bulbs in their first years of growth.



Narcissus seedlings in plunge

There is much less opportunity for the seeds to fall into the plunge like this since I switched to square plastic pots – the reason is obvious.



The pots sit edge to edge so any seeds that fall go into adjacent pots – except along the front edge where there is a small gap and that is where these seeds have germinated and are now flowering size.

Plants have a wonderful way of bringing you down to earth with a thump. So often when you think you have triumphed and produce a wonderful pot full of flowering bulbs they suddenly go backwards, you

nearly lose them (sometimes you do) then you struggle to build what remains of the once healthy bulbs back up again. The other example of nature keeping the grower in his place is the ignominy when the seeds that fall into the plunge seem much happier and reach flowering size quicker than the ones we have carefully sown into a pot and nurtured. There are lessons we can learn here and that was where I first got the idea to try and sow my Narcissus seeds deeply in the pot and not on the surface just covered with just a shallow layer of gravel. The seeds that performed best in the plunge were the ones that had got buried deep in the sand as I moved the pots around.



Narcissus 'Cedric Morris'

It is not just in the bulb houses that there are signs of Narcissus growth – out in the garden the leaves of many *Narcissus bulbicodium* are emerging and this group of *Narcissus* 'Cedric Morris' also has advanced flower buds.

Narcissus 'Cedric Morris'

I also keep a couple of pots of *Narcissus* 'Cedric Morris' in the bulb house where I can enjoy their long lasting flowers, which often open in mid-December, sheltered from the extremes of our winter climate. When you compare the same type of bulb growing in the open garden against those in the bulb house it is so often the case that the ones in the garden are more advanced than those kept under glass. One of the reasons for this, and the lesson to learn, is that the ones in the garden have a more even level of moisture available.





Narcissus cantabricus foliosus

One of the delights of growing bulbs is that no matter what time of year it is there are always different genera and species to give us interest. Now my interest is starting to switch from the Crocus as the autumn ones have peaked to the winter flowering Narcissus which like this *Narcissus cantabricus foliosus* are just starting to produce their flowers. It is now time to start to look carefully at the flowers and check the identity to ensure they are what the label says. Remember the more you study your flowers the more you will get a feel for the wee differences that separate them.



**Narcissus cantabricus
foliosus**

When looked at from the side *Narcissus cantabricus foliosus* displays its long elegant tapering tube which is slightly creamy when it first emerges but quickly turns pure white. Other points to look for are the slight twist in the tepals, the filaments turn upwards to hold the golden anthers in a bunch quite far back in the corona.

It also has a lovely sweet scent.



Narcissus romieuxii mesatlanticus

This is the plant that we have in cultivation as *Narcissus romieuxii mesatlanticus* – there appear to be a number of forms of this around. I have strong suspicions that many if not all of them are actually hybrids between *Narcissus cantabricus foliosus* and *Narcissus romieuxii*. This is the original form that I got from Harold Esslemont some thirty years ago and if you compare its profile to the previous species you will see some similarity in the shape of the tube but it is slightly less elegant and the corona has a different shape – more akin to many forms of *Narcissus romieuxii*.



Narcissus romieuxii mesatlanticus

When it first opens the flower is creamy but as with *Narcissus cantabricus foliosus* it turns white after a few days. Differences are the anthers and style are extended to the end and sometimes exerted beyond the rim of the corona – also it has no scent that I can detect.

If you look at the smaller picture to the right above you will notice that the anthers are held in two layers – three forward and three back. This is purely to do with maturity as three always mature before the others as part of the plants survival strategy to prolong the period when fertile pollen is available. The picture above shows the anthers all bunched now they are all mature.



Narcissus seedling

I will finish off this weeks bulb log with this Narcissus seedling that I raised from seed taken from open pollinated flower of Narcissus 'Camoro' which is a fertile hybrid between *Narcissus cantabricus monophyllus* and *Narcissus romieuxii*. I have no way of telling if another flower provided the pollen or if this plant was self pollinated but it is similar to 'Camoro' but has a wider more flared corona. The picture below looking into the flower also shows that three of the anthers are held upright as they have dehisced while the other three have still to extend and split to reveal their pollen.

