



BULB LOG 42.....21st October 2009



Beautiful Moth on crocus

While inspecting the bulbs I found this beautiful moth clinging to the tube of a crocus flower - beauty may be in the eye of the beholder but I certainly found it fascinating.

While it stood out very obviously against the crocus I can imagine that it would be almost impossible to detect on the side of a pine tree where its pattern would just merge with the bark.

I am wondering what attracted the moth into the bulb house ?

Was it drawn to the warmth and shelter, was it attracted to the colour of the various crocus flowers or was it lured by the lovely scent that many crocus species emit?





Crocus banaticus

There is surely no more distinctive crocus than *Crocus banaticus* with its inner three 'petals' being so much shorter than the outer three. This is one of the species that I grow in an outside frame as it prefers not to get too hot and dry in the summer. It also grows well in garden beds but I always like to grow some in pots so that I can take them under glass to enjoy glorious deep blue with just a hint of red through to violet coloured flowers.



Crocus banaticus

While the *Crocus banaticus* and other species that are growing in the open garden have to take their chances with some very inclement weather those that I take under glass can flower without the pounding damage caused by the heavy wind and rain that we are currently experiencing.

Two other advantages are that under glass I can prevent the slug damage that the open garden ones so often suffer from where their floral tube is chewed through at ground level causing them to topple over.

Plus there is a greater chance of a successful pollination and fertilisation in the bulb house and you can see that the pollen has already been transferred onto the multi branched style tips – perhaps it was the moth above that pollinated it?



Crocus longiflorus

Crocus flowers are still the dominant feature of the bulb house and the garden beds even though they are somewhat battered out of doors. I have several pots of different clones of *Crocus longiflorus* enjoying the protection of the glass house and also *Crocus cartwrightianus*.



Crocus cartwrightianus



Crocus laevigatus

I have many pots of *Crocus laevigatus* which I keep raising from seeds every year as I cannot resist it. The flowers vary in colour from almost pure white to deep violet and always have some degree of the darker feathering making each one different.



Crocus laevigatus

The seedlings not only differ in colour and size but also the period when they will flower. These are among the first to flower this season and I will have others that do not flower until February.



Crocus mathewii corm

I had cause to repot this *Crocus mathewii* corm this week and took the opportunity to photograph it at this stage of growth.

I placed it on top of a cylinder of yellow foam so I could see clearly the roots, the shoot and the additional shoots appearing from all around the corm. The close up pictures below show clearly that there are four additional shoots three growing from the sides and one from the base with what looks like another one appearing from the base.

New corms are formed every year at the base of the stem and I hope that each of these growths will produce a new corm by the end of the growing season. Some may take a further years growth before they reach flowering sized corms.



Crocus mathewii corm



Arisaema nepenthoides berries

I am still working my way through the task of sowing all my own garden collected seeds and among one of those I am pleased to have collected is these *Arisaema nepenthoides* berries. This is one of my favourite species and I lost my plants a few years ago to a late heavy frost. Fortunately I had collected a few seeds from it a few years previously and these resulted in a small clump of tubers one of which flowered this year giving me a good head of berries.

Cleaning *Arisaema nepenthoides* berries

I have often wondered why nothing in our garden is attracted to the heads of berries produced on the various *Arisaema* species that we grow.

Today while I was cleaning these *Arisaema nepenthoides* berries by rubbing them between layers of newspaper I sensed a smell rising from the pulp and found my eyes nipping. Obviously some chemical is contained in the flesh that was acting as an irritant to my eyes and I am glad that I was not allowing it to contact my skin. I wonder if this is the same in all species and if that is what prevents the birds from touching these highly attractive looking bright red berries.



During the cleaning process I noticed that I had rubbed off the outer skin from around the individual seeds revealing a curious green colour. I decided to explore these fascinating seeds further and dissected one to see the interior which revealed a green shoot surrounded by a white pithy looking food store as you can see in the picture below.



Dissected *Arisaema nepenthoides* seed



Erythronium klamathense seeds before and after soaking

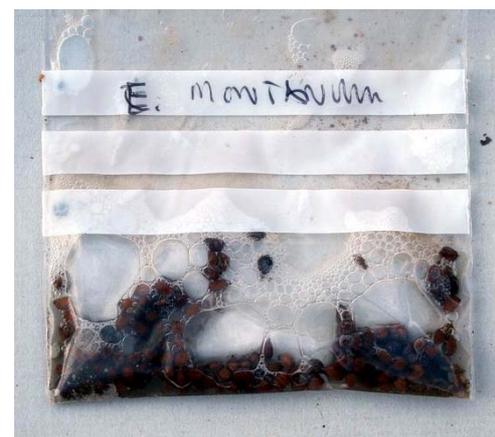
These *Erythronium klamathense* seeds had been stored in dry sand since I collected them from our plants in July and the left hand picture shows that the seeds look pretty wrinkled and rather unpromising. After soaking them for 24 hours they have plumped up beautifully and I am now much more hopeful of a successful germination.



Erythronium montanum seeds

These *Erythronium montanum* seeds look to have stored much better than the *E. klamathense* ones above but I still soaked them over night.

My method of soaking seeds is to add a small amount of water to the plastic pocket containing the seeds; then I rub my finger on the top of the washing up liquid bottle or a soap bar and just dip my finger into the water in the pocket. This tiny amount of soap is enough to act as a wetting agent, breaking down the surface tension allowing the seeds to absorb the moisture and re-hydrate themselves.





Sowing Fritillaria seeds

There is no need or advantage to soaking Fritillaria seeds as far as I know.

Have been stored dry in paper bags over the summer and I am now sowing the last of them to ensure the best germination results in the spring.



Colchicum coustourierii

The picture above is *Colchicum coustourierii* which is sometimes considered to be a variation of *Colchicum cupanii* which you can see on the right.

They certainly look very similar though *C. cupanii* has slightly fuller flowers with more rounded tips to the petals.

Colchicum cupanii





Iris barnumae

I do not grow a lot of *Iris* but I was given some seeds of *Iris barnumae* a number of years ago and this is the resulting pot: I am wondering if the plant with the sickle shaped recurved leaves is a flowering specimen while the ones with straight leaves are less mature or if this is a variation in leaf habitat that can occur in this species.



Moth

I will leave you this week with another picture of the moth, which as I was photographing it, started to vibrate its wings – preparing itself to fly off which it did immediately after I had taken this picture.