



BULB LOG 50.....14th December 2011



Berries on ground

Last week we got hit by a ‘weather bomb’- You may well ask what is that? It is to do with barometric pressure differences and when a big differential occurs between areas very strong winds are the result. Scotland was well hit by winds in excess of 100 miles per hour causing some amount of problems and damage. I had my journey home from a speaking engagement in Stirling disrupted when the train I was travelling on hit a tree that had blown onto the line. Luckily it was only the train that was damaged and we had to limp some 30 miles at 10 miles per hour to the next station.

The worst that happened in our garden was that most of the berries got blown off the trees, which is a great pity as we always get big flocks of migrating thrushes descending to feed in our garden as they arrive from Scandinavia.





Cardiocrinum giganteum

The leaves of this *Cardiocrinum giganteum* are well frosted now exposing the bulb sitting half out of the ground. This is how they like to grow and if you buy a mature bulb you should not bury it deeply as with other lilies but leave at least the top sticking out of the ground. The bulbs are very hardy and even sitting exposed like this they have never suffered any frost damage in our garden.



Ipheion leaves

Looking around there are a number of early risers making an appearance such as the leaves of many of the *Ipheions* which start into growth very early and survive all the way through the winter.



Iris reticulata shoots

Just to the left of the Ipheion are the shoots of reticulate Irises waiting for warmer weather. I don't know if it is purely warmer conditions that stimulate them into flower or if it is a combination of temperature and or light values but they mostly flower around the same time each year and it is not necessarily during warmer conditions when they do. What causes many bulbs to flower at the time they do is complex depending on a number of parameters which are not fully understood.



As I mentioned last week I have now moved the Cyclamen into the shelter of the glasshouse.



Narcissus in Bulb House

Despite the frost on the glasshouse roof the Narcissus continue to bloom. Obviously heat is not a requirement for them to flower but the cold does slow down the development of the flowers. Ideally I would like it to get cold around three to four

weeks after first watering them so that the growth would be on hold all through the winter then when the light levels start to improve in March if we could enjoy a sudden spell of good warm weather and sunshine that would speed them into flowering on nice short stems. Instead we have to put up with the long etiolated flower stems caused by the stop/start winter conditions and low light levels. This does not stop us enjoying these wonderful hoop petticoat daffodils every winter.

Narcissus Flowers

With such changeable conditions through the winter it is difficult to decide when it is best to water the bulbs. As many are well into growth with a complete complement of leaves and flowers it is beneficial that they have sufficient water available to them and critical that they do not dry out. There are a number of pots that have a lot of growth in and I would like to give them some water soon but the forecast is that a



cold front is moving in and it is best that the bulbs have not just been watered when freezing conditions are imminent. It is always a compromise between giving them sufficient water to grow well and trying to minimise the effects of the frost which penetrates wet compost much quicker than moist compost. Due to the cool moist conditions through November there has been little evaporation so the only water lost from the compost is what is used up by the plants for growth and transpiration. As these Narcissus have put on most of their growth they just need sufficient water to sustain the leaves, stems and flowers - however as the flowers start to fade they will start to build up their bulbs adding new layers, perhaps dividing into two, plus they will start to form the flower buds for next year: they need a steady supply of water to enable this next stage of growth.



Narcissus buds appearing

Other Narcissus are either not showing at all yet or are just poking through as above. These just need a constantly moist state to survive. If the weather warms up and they start to actively grow then they will need extra watering.



Bulb house

The other plunge in the bulb house has more Crocus and other genera in it and they too need careful watering to optimise their growth.



Crocus with fading flowers

Most Crocus that have flowered and have well developed leaves also need kept moist at all times and as the next stage of growth for them is to produce a new corm (or more) then they too will need extra water added when the weather permits. While true bulbs such as Narcissus, Galanthus, Allium, etc are perennial, adding layers each year, the other bulbs such as Crocus, Tecophilaea and Fritillaria, are annual and have to replace themselves every year.



Crocus michelsonii shoots

Many of the spring flowering Crocus will just be pushing through their shoots as they slowly grow and these need to be kept moist with additional watering being added when the growth rate accelerates. It is mostly common sense – when a plant is in active growth it needs water and food to fuel that growth of the new cells. The bulb which is a store of food helps fuel this rapid growth but if we want them to grow well for

next year we need to provide the nutrients and the water to transport them through the plant's system.



Crocus sieberi sieberi

There is a balance to be reached as some of the bulbs can rot off when there is too much moisture around when they are not actively using it up. I find *Crocus sieberi sieberi* is one that resents too much moisture so I keep it just moist until I see active leaf growth.



Galanthus peshmenei

Galanthus in pots also need a steady level of moisture and my rule of thumb that I apply to all bulbs is water in proportion to the amount of leaf growth applies.



Muscari species

Looking at the stage of growth in some other genera I grow in pots we see that the leaves on some Muscari are already fully formed although there is no signs yet of the flower stems.



Ornithogalum lanceolatum

I have a number of Ornithogalum species, all of which are quite advanced in leaf growth and this one is even showing its flower buds. Depending on the temperatures it may be some months before these actually open.



Tecophilaea cyanocrocus

The pots of Tecophilaea are also in various stages of leaf growth - this is the most advanced pot. Again it will be some time before the flower stems start to grow. With all these different bulbs it is essential that they do not dry out as they need moisture to sustain the leaves that are there – when the flowers stems start to grow they will need slightly more water and after the flowers pass their peak I will start on the supplementary potassium feeding. Having the pots sitting on a good depth of sand helps maintain the moisture level over the long period when I cannot water directly provided that there is good contact between the potting mix and the sand bed. Also the roots of many of these bulbs will have grown out through the drainage holes and into the sand.



Aluminium trays

The moisture levels in the pots on these shallow aluminium trays need closer watching as there is just 3cms of sand and so there is not the same degree of buffering.



Another view of the berries is my final picture this week and the forecast is of another 'weather bomb' on its way this week.....