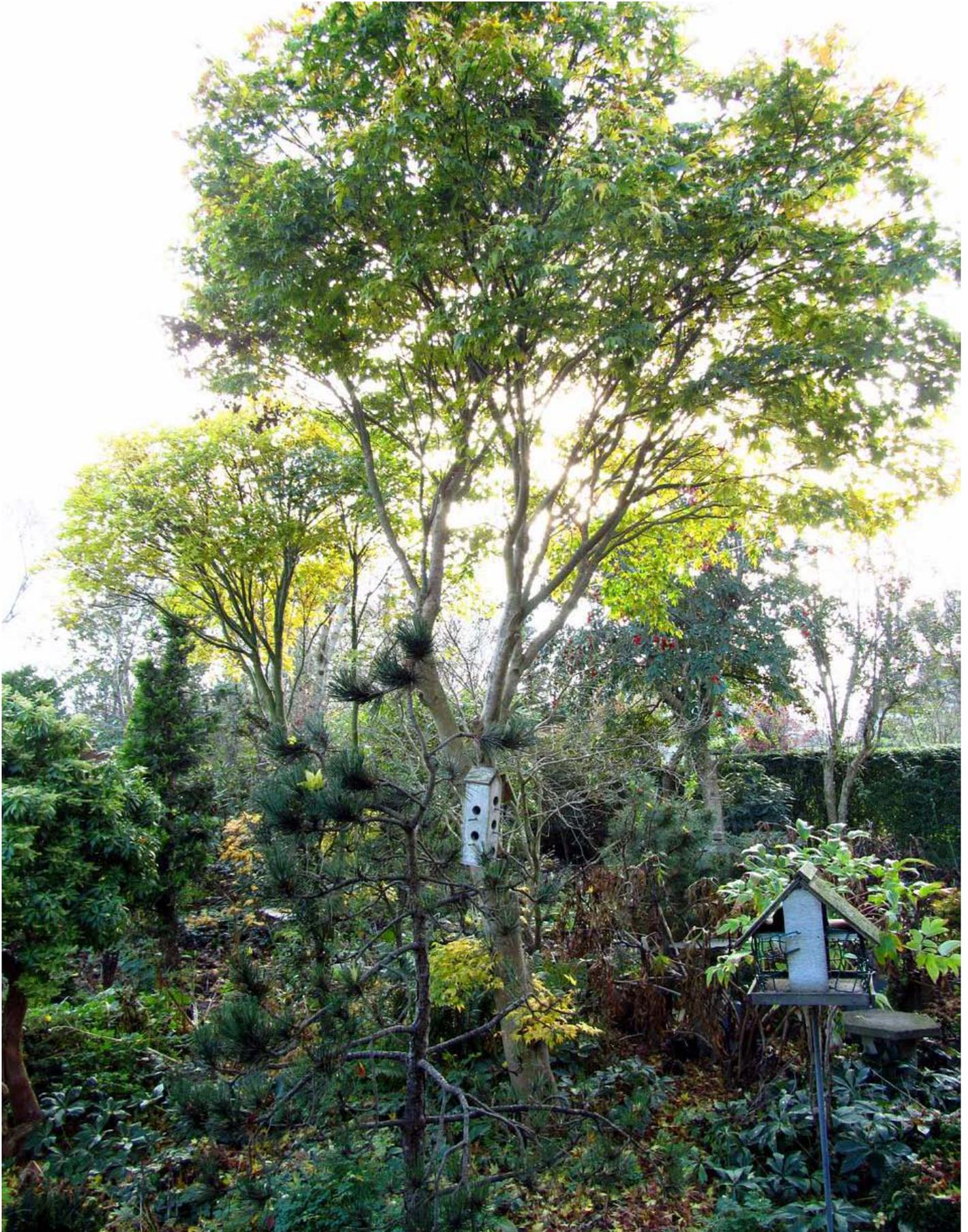




BULB LOG 47.....23rd November 2011



Acer japonicum

We are nearly at the end of November and the leaves on some Acer japonicum are only just turning yellow.



Acer japonicum

I raised these trees from seed collected from our Acer japonicum 'Aconitifolium' that we grow in a container near the pond. When I suggest to people that they grow trees from seed they say that it will take too long – that is not necessarily the case. If the seedlings are grown on well and planted out at a young age they will quickly attain a reasonable size. I have found that seedlings treated well can overtake container grown trees planted at the same time – especially if the container trees have been in the pot too long and received a check to their growth by poor care at a garden centre – something that is all too common. These trees have been managed regularly by removing the lower branches and thinning the canopy to keep both the effect of height and allow plants to grow right up to the



base. I always try and have an eye on the future and so I have left a few of the young growths that have appeared on the trunk where branches have been removed. Each year I pinch back the growing tips on these lower growths to keep them bushy. This leaves a few options open to me if the trees get too big - I can thin the canopy down to a series of stylised 'cloud pruned' branches or I can bring them right down in height by cutting the trunk above these growths almost like a giant garden bonsai. It is the unusually mild

weather that has allowed the leaves to grow on so long and it is not just the trees that are responding to these conditions. A number of Galanthus that we are growing in pots are already approaching flowering - well ahead of

their normal flowering time of January or February. We only got these bulbs this autumn and I have observed before, that bulbs planted late often grow and flower earlier than they would if they were planted in summer when they are fully dormant. It is as if they have slept in and are rushing so much to catch up that they overtake the normal growth.



Colchicum kesselringii

This *Colchicum kesselringii* has also put in a very early appearance and it was not planted late. Many bulbs will respond in this way to the weather and if it stays mild after they have started into growth they will just grow on and flower like you see here.



Unfortunately the mild weather comes with a lot of heavy cloud and fog so the light levels are very low. Some days we never really see daylight at all. This results in the bulbs growing strongly because of the mild temperatures as they reach up to try and get to better light. It is natural for plants to try and get into good light and to do this they often have to grow taller to get above the competition - this is what we are seeing here. The blanched lower parts of the leaves have grown on these days of very low light levels. The result is we will have very tall spindly leaves and stems that flop over as they cannot support the weight of the flowers.



Once the leaves have fallen from the trees I will have the task of gathering them up off the beds. As these Acer leaves are relatively small I could in theory just leave them as a natural surface mulch that would break down and form a nice woody soil. Unlike on alpiners or rock garden plants, the

leaves will not do any harm to the bulbs which are mostly not showing above ground and could easily push up through them in the spring. However I want to make plenty of leaf mould for potting mixes and as a soil conditioner so I will gather these from this bed. I do not lift the leaves on other beds at the far end of the garden where they form a natural mulch.

Front Drive

It is a different story in the front drives where most of the growth has now gone dormant for the winter and I can cut back the remains of the Geraniums, etc. that have trapped a lot of fallen leaves which have blown in from the street.

A good rake and then a trim to ground level with some shears takes a while as I have to avoid slicing off the odd Cyclamen and some autumn flowering Crocus leaves that are in growth. Once that is done I can lift the majority of the leaves with boards and then use my garden “vac thingy” to suck up or blow away the rest.



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Job done

That is phase one now I have moved the loose stuff the ground will dry out better and I can get down to removing the odd weeds and mosses that have been exposed. All the plants in this section of our drive are the result of scattering seeds directly into the gravel.



Erythronium oregonum seeds A - flash

I was very lucky and grateful to receive some wild origin *Erythronium oregonum* seeds this week. This picture was taken using the small pop up flash on my digital SLR which I am sure you will agree gives a reasonably good result.



Digital camera and flash

However you can very simply greatly improve the result by using a reflector to bounce the flash light around. Here I have used a rectangle of polystyrene, (part of an old fish box lid) as a white reflector. Angling it slightly and holding the flash against it in effect greatly increases the size of the light source and so reduces the amount of shadow. I can further improve the effect by having another reflector at the bottom of the camera to bounce the light back into the other side of the subject.



Erythronium oregonum seeds B – bounced flash

Compare this picture (B) with the one (A) on the previous page and you will see how the reflector has improved the lighting. You can of course buy expensive ring flash or macro flash units with multiple heads but all these cost a lot of money and it is amazing what you can do with a little ingenuity and some basic recycled materials.



Erythronium and Trillium seeds

I also got a few *Trillium ovatum* seeds from the same source and when they arrived they were in paper packets which allow the moisture to escape and thus minimise the risk of the seeds rotting. As soon as I received them I transferred the seeds into plastic packets – I could have used any small container but these are the most convenient – adding a little water and the tiniest smear of soap – just enough to break the surface tension and allow the seeds to absorb the water.



Trillium ovatum seeds soaked

Here is the packet of *Trillium ovatum* seeds after an overnight soak – can you make out the slight brown stain that has come from the seeds in the water?



Trillium ovatum seed before

Here for direct comparison are the Trillium ovatum seeds before and after soaking to show the effect of rehydration.



Trillium ovatum seed after soaking

After soaking the seed look as if they have been freshly harvested from the plant and not only do they look better but they will also germinate better and more evenly. You can do this with all Trilliums, Cyclamen, Erythronium and any other plants with similar seed types.



Erythronium seeds before and after soaking

Here is a quick comparison of the dry and soaked Erythronium seeds.



Sowing Trillium seeds

In a further attempt to get the very best out of my gift of seeds I am sowing the *Trillium ovatum* seeds at different depths in the 11cm pot. I started by half filling the pot with mix and sowing some seeds then working up in a series of 1cm layers until the last layer is just about on the surface and will only be covered in gravel.

I hope that this simple crude experiment will give me a good indicator of what is the best depth to sow the seeds at.

I have had good results by sowing them deep but now I have a good chance for a direct comparison.

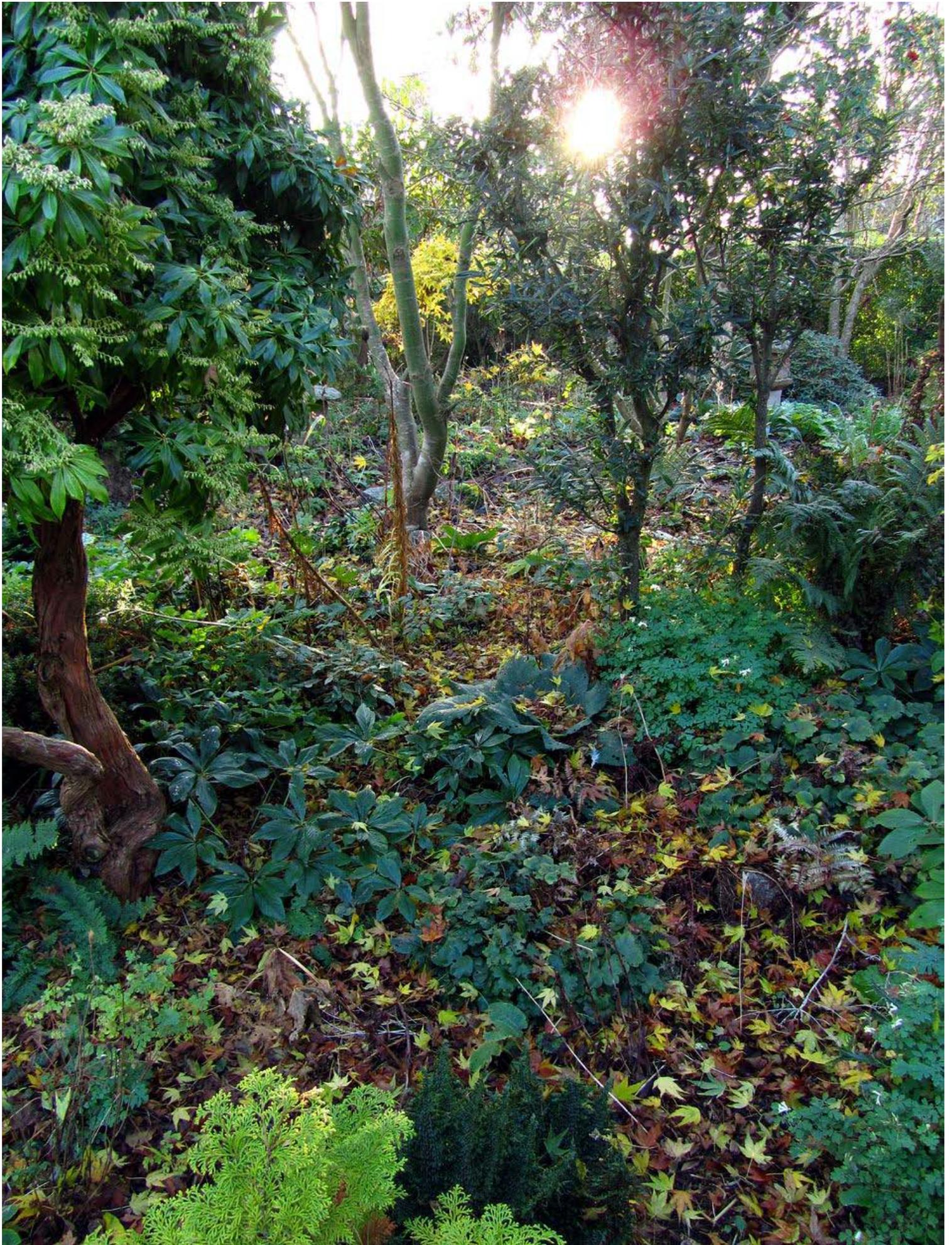


Cyclamen coum seedlings

I always state that nature is the best teacher if only we can interpret the lessons correctly. I sowed these Cyclamen coum seeds around 2cms deep, directly into the sand plunge bed as soon as they ripened and, two years on, the first of them are flowering. As this is quicker than I can flower them when I grow them in seed pots I have to conclude that their growth must get checked by the more extreme swings of moisture levels and or temperatures in the pots.



Cyclamen coum - first flowers on 2nd year seedlings



I will close with another scene of the fallen leaves with what is a rare glimpse of the sun.