



BULB LOG 16.....18th April 2012

**Spring garden**

Many of the typical spring bulbs are now well into flower creating this wonderful tapestry of colour, form and texture that we want to create in our garden beds. The aim of our garden is to establish an ever changing tapestry as the season progresses. Indeed it was only a month ago that this very same bed was full of the hot reds, pinks and purples of *Corydalis solidus*, now a new flush of bulbs along with other plants such as *Primula* and *Anemone* compete for your attention. You can never get bored or predict exactly how these plantings will look from year to year for a number of reasons. I am forever adding in new plants as they mature from the seed frames, this added to the natural increase as some plants form clumps to increase their dominance while others may gently self seed all adds to the delights and surprises that are in store for us each day as we walk the garden. The other big factor is the weather and it has more of an effect than we sometimes realise. Of course we know that many of these plants have been brought into flower a bit earlier than in other years by the recent hot spell but now the temperature has gone back to more typical figures, with 'highs' of below 10C, everything has slowed right down again. Many a flower combination that we saw last year as different bulbs flowered together is not going to happen this year. Last year the heat wave hit around this time and as a result we had a compressed flowering season with many plants flowering together – this year many flowers, brought on by the early heat wave, will be over before their companions of last year, held back by the current low temperatures, make their display. I constantly hear people saying the weather is different this year from normal and although I try hard not to, I do occasionally find myself saying it. The problem with saying that is what exactly *is* a normal year? We can work out the average by adding all the data recorded over a number of years divide it by that number and get the mean, or average but that is not *normal*. The simple fact is that no two years are the same for gardeners - each will bring successes and failures and that is what makes gardening so much fun and such a challenge at the same time.



Mixed bulb bed

Above is another mixed planting typical of how I like to 'paint' the beds with different shapes, colours and textures – like the one above, it too is full of *Corydalis* now only evident by their soft green foliage which provides a background for the emerging *Fritillaria*, *Erythronium*, *Trillium*, etc. Towards the bottom of the picture you can see evidence of one of my other delights; self seeding.



Self seeded *Fritillaria pallidiflora*

I always remember how impressed I was as a young gardener visiting the likes of Jack and Peggy Crosland's garden at the way plants were self seeding all around and thinking to myself why does that not happen in our garden? The answer is obvious and has to do with maturity of both the garden and the gardener. As a young enthusiastic gardener with only a few of these special plants I wanted to maximise their increase so I collected all the seed and sowed it in pots. Now I am a more mature grower and have lots of plants and often don't get round to or cannot be bothered to collect the seed so it falls to the ground and naturalises.



Bulb frame

Of course I still collect some seed and sow it in pots and will continue to do so when I want to maximise the yield from a seed crop. Of all the hundreds of seeds that fall in the garden only a small proportion, 10% perhaps, will grow to maturity while when I sow in pots I am disappointed if I do not achieve a 90% success rate. A number of *Fritillaria* grow better in the outside frames or beds such as *F. pallidiflora* and *F. tubiformis* growing in this frame above.



Fritillaria tubiformis

Above and below are two variations of *Fritillaria tubiformis* - the dark one above with the lovely grey bloom to the tepals being the most typical in cultivation - the paler form below was raised from wild collected seed.





Fritillaria tubiformis* ssp *moggridgei

Even within this subspecies there is variation in the degree of yellow.



Open Frame

I also grow a number of the taller growing Chinese species in this frame as they too seem to appreciate cooler, moister summers than many of the many Mediterranean species do.



Fritillaria monanthos?

I received this bulb originally as *Fritillaria wallujewii* which it obviously is not and now I think the consensus is that it is another Chinese species – possibly *Fritillaria monanthos*. It is well worth looking inside the pale greyish exterior where you will find a riot of deep red/brown speckling to help attract pollinators.





Fritillaria tortifolia

Similar in stature to the species above is the beautiful *Fritillaria tortifolia* which also has a dramatic interior.



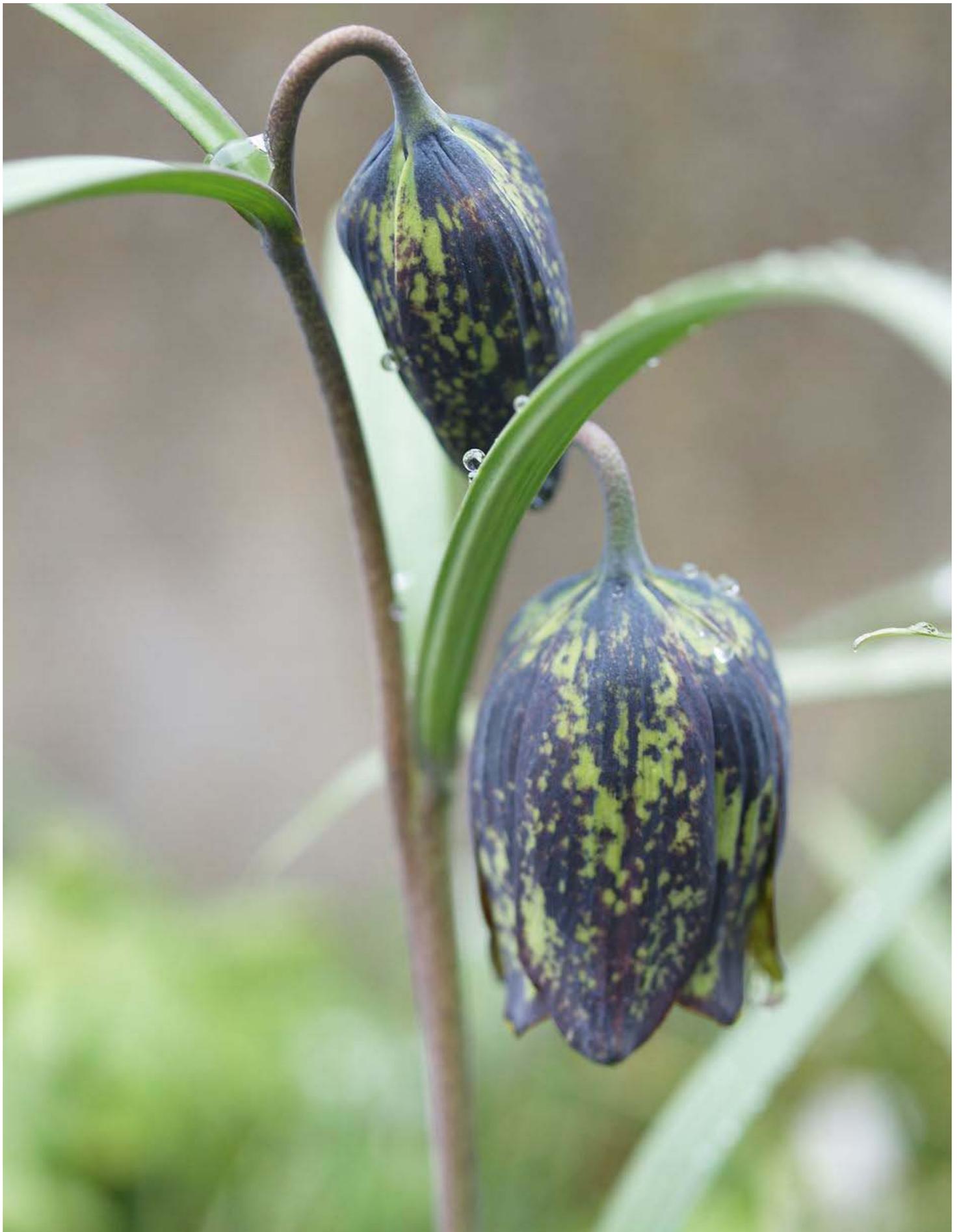


Fritillaria house

Just for insurance I also grow some of these species in the Fritillaria house but I must add that, for the most part, it is the ones growing outside that do best. Here you can see two clones of *Fritillaria tortifolia* to help with the seed set and a pot of *Fritillaria thunbergii*, of which I have only ever had one clone which increases well but has never set any seed for me.



Fritillaria thunbergii



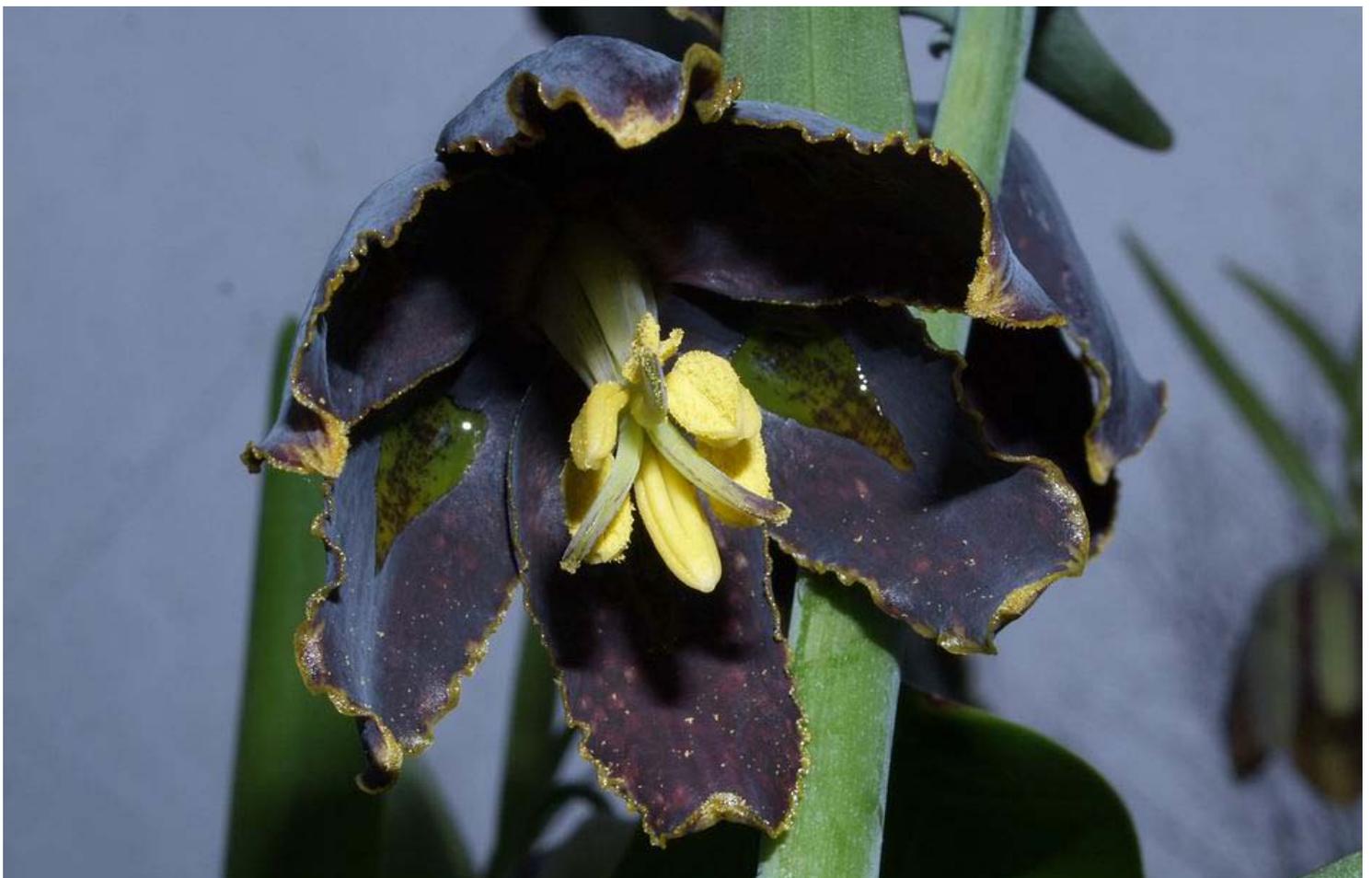
Fritillaria cirrhosa

I love *Fritillaria cirrhosa*, a widespread and variable species in the wild, (Himalaya) but I have never found it easy to increase. I have only had two introductions of seed one from an exchange that turned out to be *Fritillaria messanensis* and the true plant, above, raised from the ACE seed collection in 1994. I have seen pictures and occasional plants showing the variation and I would love to get the chance to grow more of this species.



Fritillaria affinis

Similar in colouring to *F. cirrhosa* is the North American *Fritillaria affinis* and its darker variety *tristulis*, below, both of which are easily increased by the mass of rice grains produced all over the new forming bulbs.



Fritillaria affinis tristulis



Narcissus bulbocodium in bulb house

I must also mention some of the small daffodils that are still in flower like *Narcissus bulbocodium* in the foreground above and a natural hybrid that I have always known as *Narcissus x cazorlanus*. I have not managed to bring myself up to date with the latest name changes that have been applied for *Narcissus* – we need a book.



Narcissus x cazorlanus, a naturally occurring hybrid between *Narcissus triandrus* and *N. bulbocodium*.



One of Anne Wright's beautiful hybrids involving the same two species as above.



Narcissus triandrus

I am not alone in finding this Narcissus difficult to keep long term in cultivation. It is such a beautiful species how I would love the opportunity to get a good quantity of seed to try and establish it better in our garden. h



Narcissus bulbocodium on the other hand self seeds happily around the garden as well as in pots in the bulb house.



I will round off this week's bulb log with another mixed planting typical of my style of gardening and some fine hybrid Erythrioniums below.



Erythronium 'Craigton Cover Girl' **Erythronium 'Susannah'** **Erythronium 'Minnehaha'**
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