



BULB LOG 36.....5th September 2012



The start of September is always the time I water the bulbs to wake them from their summer rest. Whenever I have the alarm clock set to wake me early I always seem to rouse, in anticipation, just before it makes that annoying peep-peep-peep and so it is with many of the bulbs waiting and ready for the cold drench of water. It may seem like a simple task to soak the dry pots but it needs careful attention to ensure that it is done thoroughly: I use a hose pipe adapted for my purpose with a recycled valve and bent pipe which allows me to carefully direct the water. I have to be careful how I direct the stream of water so it does not push a hole down into the compost and it is handy to have the broken bits of pot that I often

use to indicate which pots have been replanted to deflect and spread the water stream.



Sometimes I do not apply the top dressing of gravel at the time of repotting – this may be to indicate that it has been done or that I think the compost is a bit damp for the resting bulbs and needs to dry out - a gravel layer would slow that down. These undressed pots all have a mysterious depression in the centre which is caused by the many sparrows that have dust baths in the dry compost – I know this as I often find the bulb house full of sunning themselves in the warm sunshine. It is best to top dress all the pots before you water them because watering onto pots without gravel can cause small particles to float to the surface and form a cap that slows or prevents water penetrating deeper into the compost.



I work around the bulb house flooding every pot until the water flows over the rim; as soon as I have finished I go round a second time watching how quickly the water drains away. Dry pots are usually slow to drain but by the second watering they should be draining quickly; if they are not you may have a drainage problem. Pots that have not been replanted will always drain quicker than newly planted ones and there is a reason for this. When we plant bulbs in a pot the compost goes in in a chaotic way and when we soak it that water has to find a path through the chaos to drain away. It does this by forming a drainage system, the path of least resistance, and hence after the first few soakings the pots should drain very quickly. Pots that have not been disturbed even though they are completely dry will retain this internal drainage and so will drain that bit quicker on the first watering.



Part way through it is easy to see the difference between the wet and dry pots and you must take time to ensure that you soak all the compost and the sand plunge below completely to ensure that the bulbs can grow well. Poor soaking at this stage can allow dry pockets to form within the compost and these can stay dry with subsequent watering draining away around them.



The first Narcissus leaves are already visible on this pot which got a head start on the rest as it sits directly below a drip from a window on the bulb house.



Colchicum alpinum

A second flower rises from the Colchicum alpinum I showed a few weeks ago. Many bulbs send up multiple flowers separated by a few weeks - this is one of nature's ways of ensuring a greater chance of success so if the weather is inclement and the first flower does not get fertilised then there is a second chance. The second flowers still appear even if the first has been pollinated and seed set.



Colchicum hybrid

The time gap between second flowerings can vary and you can see multiple flower shoots rising from this larger Colchicum which can send up many more than two flowers.



Colchicum hybrid

This is the first garden colchicum to appear this year, some weeks later than most years – in the morning it was closed as shown below but by early afternoon the sunshine encouraged it to open. To further add to the strange weather patterns of the year we are enjoying a bit of a late heat wave with an official temperature 25C being recorded for Aberdeen although we only hit 23C in our garden.





Crocus vallicola

The first flower on Crocus vallicola is also some two weeks later in appearing this year.



Allium wallichii

The later flowering Alliums add some valuable colour to the garden attracting many insects.



Their flowers may not seem that showy to the casual viewer; I find them fascinating, worthy of closer inspection.



Cyclamen hederifolium



Cyclamen hederifolium silver leaf forms mix with the leaves from *Betula utilis* which, along with the many sorbus we grow, are already shedding leaves.



Gentiana septemfida



The *Gentiana septemfida* group are very reliable plants, bringing flowering colour to our gardens over a long period in August and September.



Eucomis bicolor has a strong growth of leaves, much enjoyed by the huge numbers of slugs and snails, but showing no signs of flowering this year.



Eucomis bicolor

Things look better from low down - the lovely red spotted leaves rising indicates that the bulb is increasing even if it is not going to flower.



Ophiopogon nigrescens

Ophiopogon nigrescens is mostly grown for the decorative value of its black leaves but once established it will send up many stems of delicate flowers.



***Ophiopogon nigrescens* flowers**



On Saturday I am one of the speakers, along with Harry Jans, and Kit Strange, at **‘Home and Away - Cultivation and Exploration’** - a one day conference organised by The Norfolk Group of the AGS to be held at the Abbey Conference Centre, Norwich (5 minutes from A47) Further details contact: Tony Goode (Tel: 01603 409074) Tickets from: Diane Blyth (Tel: 01508 494277) – I hope to see some of you there.