



BULB LOG 16.....17th April 2013



Of all the indicators that spring has arrived in our garden the most reliable is the laying of frogspawn in our cold shaded pond. This week the temperature in Aberdeen hit 15C, we were the warmest place in the country and how the plants responded. While on my hands and knees checking the frames I was suddenly aware that I was being watched by a large puddock. The presence of duckweed on its back suggested that it had been in the pond recently so I went to check and right enough there was some frogspawn plus a number of amorous frogs.

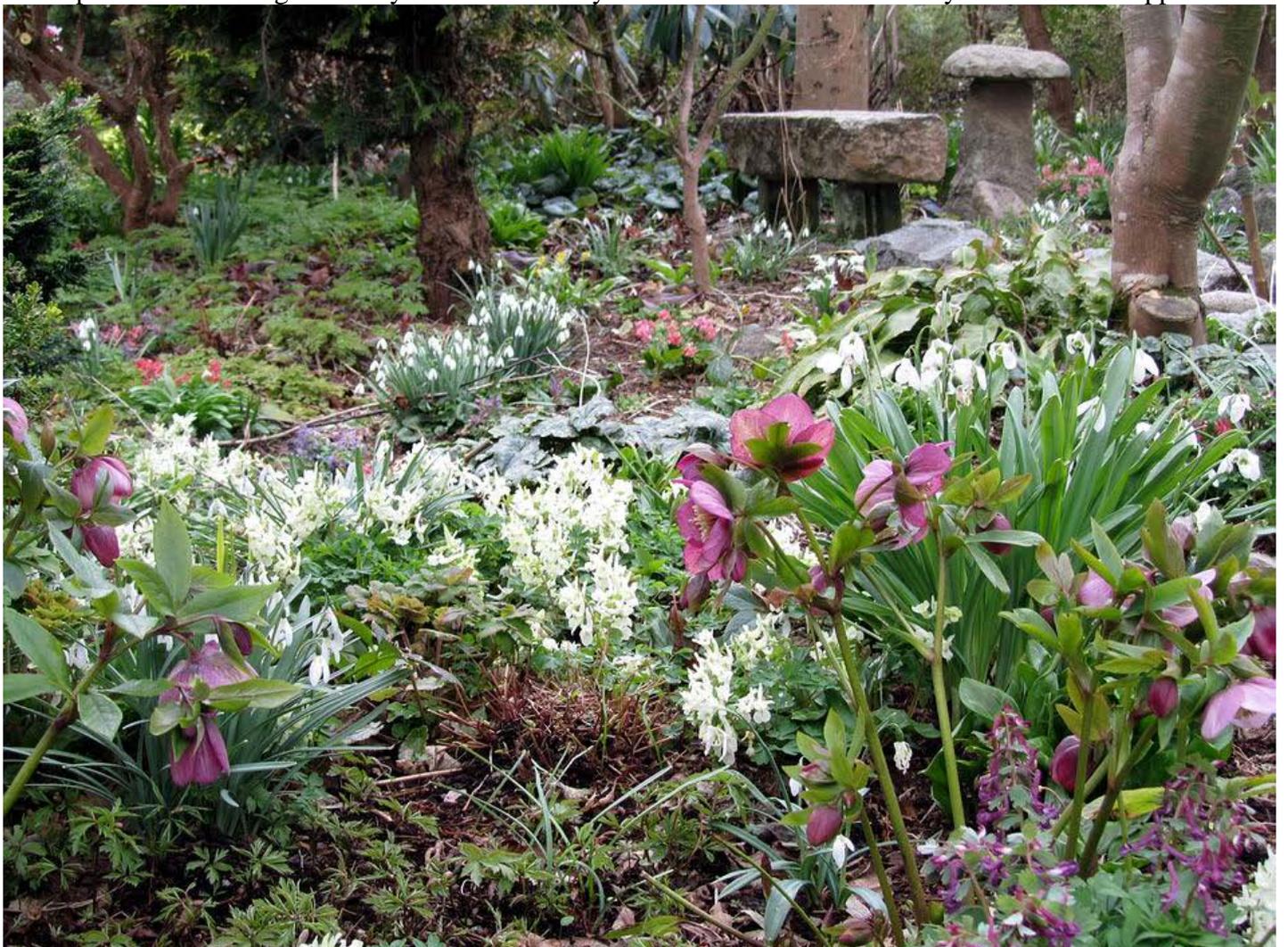
This warm weather was all the plants were waiting for and within a very short time many had burst into bloom and you could almost see their stems growing – some put on 8cms of growth in 24hours.



The bulb beds are changing rapidly and it is fascinating to observe how we get different flower combinations each year as the weather pattern varies. This time last year the *Fritillaria imperialis* were in full flower.



Snowdrops are still looking relatively fresh as the Corydalis are in full flower and Erythronium buds appear.



Hellebores, Corydalis and Galanthus are good growing companions and feature in this area.



Hepatica is another plant that works well with the early flowering bulbs and I am trying to build up a wide range of colours to have mixed plantings – this is a good blue form.





Colchicum are much maligned by the gardening press because they grow leaves! As a result they are often avoided by gardeners but I would not be without them for the wonderful display of flowers they display from August through to winter. Consider where you plant them and what you plant them with and they are great plants. Here a large planting of *Colchicum speciosum* is sending up their lovely glossy green leaves to compliment some Hellebores, these work very well together. Also planted here are *Aquilegia* that will flower in the summer along with some of the larger *Alliums* that flower on tall stems above the *Colchicum* leaves. The leaves of many *Alliums* look very tatty when the plants are in flower so we disguise them with the *colchicum* leaves.



It is very easy to distinguish *Erythronium dens-canis* leaves from the Western North American species such as *Erythronium revolutum*. The leaves on the top right of this group patterned with dark random blotches are *E. dens-canis* while the ones where the markings avoid the veins of the leaves are the western ones



Erythronium dens-canis

This is the darkest colour form of *Erythronium dens-canis* that we have – it is very difficult to capture the true colour photographically especially in bright sunlight. There is a form that goes around called ‘Old Aberdeen’ that is described as the darkest however the form in common circulation is not the original clone that was given this name.



Erythronium dens-canis

It is also easy to tell *E. dens-canis* flowers from any other pink one by its dark violet anthers.



Erythronium dens-canis white form

There are a number of white forms of *Erythronium dens-canis* in circulation under various names all of which have the characteristic violet anthers – we have raised white seedlings from pink parents.



Erythronium japonicum is related to *E. dens-canis* and shares the random type of leaf pattern as you will see in the foreground above - immediately behind are some typical leaves of the Western North American types. With experience it is possible to tell *E. japonicum* from its close relatives by the leaves alone – it is difficult to put it into words but *japonicum* forms have a sort of silver veil over the markings like you were viewing them through very thin tissue paper.



Erythronium japonicum



Above is a small group of *Erythronium japonicum* showing the range of leaf markings from some that have almost no visible pattern to others with varying amounts of random dark brown blotches—all are masked by the veil. The flowers also vary in the dark blackcurrant pattern near the centre. All are very dramatic. Some also have white highlights around the central zone.

Like *E. dens-canis* they all have dark violet anthers but are easily separated by the dark central markings.



Another variation in this Eurasian complex is **Erythronium sibiricum** also just opening now. The immediate difference to take note of is that the anthers are always yellow – I have read a report from a field trip that mentions seeing flowers with violet pollen as well as with yellow but I have not seen any confirmed evidence of this.



The white form **Erythronium sibiricum subsp. altaicum** comes true from seed.



The plants in the two previous pictures are in pots that I moved into the glasshouse from an open frame to encourage the stem to grow: above a group of second generation garden seed raised plants are just starting to open.



Crocus pelistericus



Plunge bed

We grow a number of bulbs such as *Erythronium sibiricum* and *Crocus pelistericus* that enjoy cool moist growing conditions in this bed. They are grown in a mixture of grit, sand and leaf mould in square mesh pond planting baskets which are plunged into sharp sand and covered with an organic mulch. Should the need arise, it is easy to water this bed to keep the bulbs cool and moist in the summer.



Narcissus cyclamineus also grows well in these conditions. This bulb is very slow to increase vegetatively so we use this group to provide seed to help us to spread this plant around the garden.

- Wash hands after use.
- To be used only where there is a recognised need. Do not exceed application rate.

UK/ROI Fertiliser Declaration
 EC Fertiliser – Potassic Fertiliser – Sulphate of Potash
 Potassium Oxide (K₂O) soluble in water 48.0% (39.9%K)

1.5kg e

B&Q plc,
 Chandlers Ford, Hants,



A reminder it is now, as the flowers are fading, that the bulbs under glass need plenty of potassium and to ensure they get this I feed them with a Potassium sulphate fertiliser that comes in the form of a soluble white powder.



I use a small wooden scoop, a tea spoon would also do, to sprinkle a small amount on to the gravel surface of each pot - this is best done on a dry sunny day.



The amount is not too critical as you are unlikely to overdose or harm the plants I gauge the amount by the size of the pot and the number of bulbs growing – a level teaspoon would be plenty for around four of these 7cm pots or two well planted 11 cm pots. You should not apply it to newly germinated seedlings as they are more sensitive and can get damaged if they come into direct contact with the powder – for young seedlings I use quarter strength liquid tomato type fertiliser. It is important to water as soon as you can to wash the fertiliser powder into the compost – some of the larger grains may remain on the surface but do not worry as each time you water a bit more will dissolve.



Back to the rock garden for the final two pictures this week where the bulbs give the early colour before the alpins bloom.

