



BULB LOG 05..... 30th January 2013



Galanthus 'Don Armstrong'



It is a snow scene that covered much of the country in the last week and in this part we enter a second week of snow cover but the plants continue to push through the white blanket. In the south 'white fever' has awoken with vigour as our friends enjoy the start of the Galanthus season rushing from garden to garden to view and purchase the white treasures. It will be some weeks or a month before we are likely to see the peak of the Galanthus flowering in our area but that can all change so quickly if we get a mild period as the long term weather forecast is predicting.



The leaves of the Cyclamen must provide a degree of protection for the corm below.



Many a hellebore is also standing proud of the snow displaying their fat flower buds full of promise.



Undeterred by the snow the buds on this Saxifrage continue to develop – it will not take much of a temperature change to encourage them to open their flowers.



Snow is a great cover to protect the garden and I only wish we could have snow cover the garden from November until February, holding the plants back until we get a true spring with warmer sunny days but that is never going to happen in Scotland.

There is a commonly used saying that ‘all gardens look the same under the snow’ the implication being that it does not matter if you have a well planted and tended garden or a weedy mess, they are all brought to the same level under a blanket of snow. I have never agreed with this – a well designed garden will still look better under the snow as it will have interesting humps and bumps rather than just a flat surface. This can be evidenced even on the small scale of these troughs.



Too many people are not bold enough when they landscape their troughs leaving them relatively flat with just a few rocks placed across the surface. After a while the compost will settle and sink usually resulting in the surface being well below the rim of the trough. I have learnt over the years to build up the troughs as high as I can – piling compost on until it comes to a point then covering the surface with rock work – removing some compost as necessary to accommodate the rocks. The result landscape can be seen even under a deep covering of snow - the trough has an interesting shape.

To show how quickly our weather can change this is the same trough pictured barely fifteen hours after the snow covered one above.



The winds turned from the North east to a westerly which brought with it a large Atlantic low pressure system and the temperature shot up to 5C over night melting much of the snow cover.



Another trough and another variation on the shape of the snow cap – no two look the same even under snow.



Again the next morning the snow has gone revealing the resting plants and the landscape of the concrete block.



– viewed collectively the troughs offer an interesting variation of snow cap.



The sudden thaw allowed me to get the cover off the plunge frame that sits between the bulb houses – I was delighted to see these seedling *Eranthis pinnatifida* emerging again - one at least with a flower bud. Sown in 2009 they germinated around this time in 2010 so it has taken three years of growth for them to achieve flowering size.



The parent pot that provided me with the seed in the first place is also bursting in to life. The plants have been slowly forming underground since the autumn and now the daylight extends the stems start to elongate to hold the flowers clear of the ground in the hope of attracting a pollinator. I will lift this plant into a bulb house to encourage the flowers to open and let the pollen flow – the seed of this plant is precious so I will ensure the pollination is done with my paint brush.



What a delight to find seed I was generously given of a number of forms and species of *Eranthis* new to our garden are germinating – I will have to wait until 2016 for the first flower. ***Eranthis byunsanensis*** is a synonym for *E. pinnatifida* but looks slightly different to the form we grow – to see more check out this [Eranthis thread](#) on the forum – I could never have enough of this beautiful group of *Eranthis*. Notice that unlike others of this genus these *Eranthis pinnatifida* and synonyms have only a single seed leaf.



Grey Mould



I was served a timely warning today when I observed that grey mould was forming on the tiny remains of the crocus flowers on the gravel surface of some pots. If the mould comes into contact with the new leaves they can also become infected so it is extremely important to keep removing the remains, no matter how small, of the flowers from the pots as they go over to prevent mould forming.



I love playing and experimenting with bulbs and seeds. When I lost so many pots of bulbs a few winters ago my disappointment was tempered by discovering I had an area of plunge that was not immediately needed for pots of bulbs so I have been planting it up with small bulbs mostly Crocus, Narcissus and Fritillaria.



Although many of those bulbs were tiny, some of the Narcissus have flower buds emerging now. The plunge is very shallow with barely 5cms of sand so it will be interesting to observe how the bulbs will grow – one thing I will have to ensure with such a small volume is that it does not dry out during the critical phases of growth – right now being one of those periods when sufficient water is essential for the growth of the bulbs.



I also scattered surplus seed of many bulbs over the surface – above the Fritillaria seed is most obvious.



On looking carefully I noticed that a few were already sending out a growth to push down into the sand. In the case of Fritillaria the new bulb will form towards the bottom of this probing growth which in this shallow plunge will be on the bottom board.



Crocus seed germinating



Although I would normally sow crocus seeds deep down in the compost I just scattered them onto this plunge so some are sitting on the surface. The seeds that I recommend that you sow deep such as Narcissus and Crocus will germinate and grow on if surface sown but they will grow better and reach flowering size quicker if you sow them deep.

Study the young Crocus plant germinating and you see a radical emerging from the seed turning upwards - where the first leaf is forming the radical branches sending a shoot down into the sand. Just where the radical enters the sand you will notice a constriction and a change of colour - this is the start of the corm forming and below that the root that will feed the young plant for the rest of this growing season. If left to its own devices you can see that this young vulnerable

corm will have to spend its entire first twelve months and more exposed on the surface - I will follow its progress.



More scenes from the garden show how quickly the mild wind melted the snow cover – above is a sand plunge bed and the same scene taken next day is on the right above.

I spoke of how I can learn from how the snow does not lie so thickly under trees and shrubs and we can learn further about the various different conditions in our gardens by observing how the snow melts. A deep thick layer still covers the bulb bed on the right while if I just turn through 180 degrees and photograph the other direction, below, there is virtually no snow remaining. The main reason is that the area below has a canopy of Acers which prevents the snow layer from being so deep.



So what can I learn from this? First the bulb bed above is more exposed so will get more snow or rain falling

directly on to it so at times it will be wetter. However being more exposed it will also have a higher evaporation rate as wind and warm sunshine pull moisture from the surface. The area under the trees will get less direct water especially when the trees are in leaf but the ground will be shaded from most direct sunshine and the wind across the surface will also be reduced so evaporation rate will be less – but then I have to take into account the trees taking up the moisture. All these factors give a wide range of habitats even in our relatively small garden and that is one of the reasons we can grow such a wide range of plants.





The snow patches in this picture shows further some of the very different habitats we have in the garden with a similar case only in miniature in the trough below.....

