



BULB LOG 29.....17th July 2013



I am in full replanting mode, working through the Erythronium plunge frames with my wee helper. Re-potting every year is best but with so many bulbs in pots and containers this is not possible so I try to replant at least every second year. The last time I did a major re-pot of these plunges was in 2009 – the summer of 2011 was so cold and wet that I could not disturb the bulbs, 2012 also had a wash out of a summer but 2013 is making up for that as we are having something of a heat wave

with temperatures above 20C most days. In an ideal world all my plunge frames would be well away from trees and shrubs but this is not practical in a small garden and as you see we have a Sorbus tree growing adjacent to the frames and a hedge running down the side - tree roots are attracted towards the added nutrition in my potting mix.



The roots run through the sand and seem particularly attracted towards the leaf mould that I add to my mix and then they rob both the nutrients and moisture intended for the bulbs.



In two years this is not a big problem but after four years the roots are becoming larger and I think you can see that I would not want to be leaving them for any longer or the roots would get too large to extract from the baskets without damage.



The mesh baskets that I use are intended for planting aquatic plants in ponds and have an all over mesh with holes of around 1mm. I have three sizes 30cms, 25cms and 20cms and I mostly use the small and middle sized ones.



When replanting the Erythroniums I turn the basket out upside down as invariably the Erythronium bulbs will be at the bottom and there is less chance to damage the bulbs coming at them from the bottom.



Erythronium tuolumnense increase quickly by offsets – all the bulbs above came out of this 25cm basket.



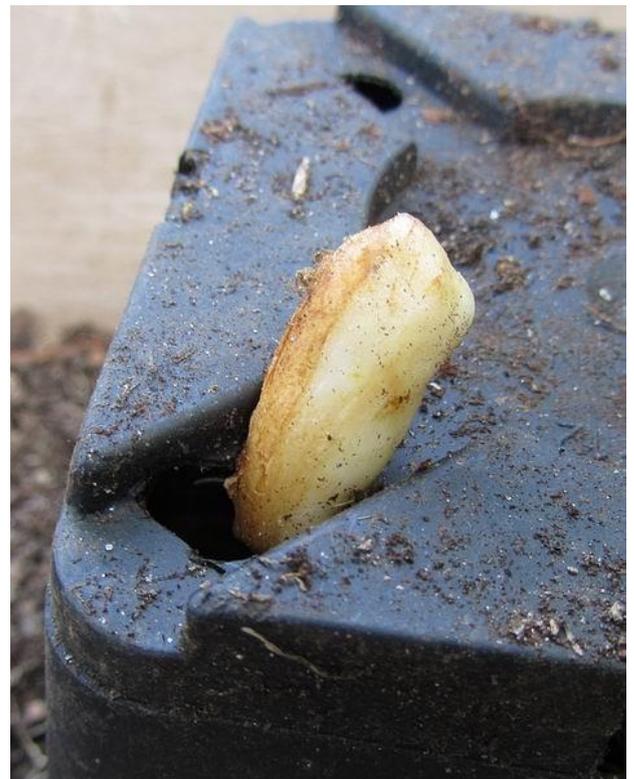
I replant a suitable number back into the basket leaving plenty of this species left over to plant in the garden or pass around.

This year we are doing some major work in the front garden removing some trees and shrubs so I have plenty planting opportunities to plant these spares. I do not replace all the compost but freshen up the old with the addition of some leaf mould and a sprinkle of bone meal.

As my compost is a mixture of sand, grit and leaf mould there is little to degrade except the leaf mould so it keeps the desirable properties of being able to retain air and moisture.



Erythronium bulbs will descend until they find a stable environment that suits their needs and they do this by elongating the bulb so it forms a long slender form that is very easily broken. Luckily if you do break one plant both bits and at least one part will grow. The bulb, above right, is not only at the bottom of the pot but as you can see below is escaping through the drainage hole. I could just snap the bulb off and replant both bits but in this case the bulb is more precious than the pot so I carefully enlarge the drainage hole to allow me to remove the bulb intact.





The top bulb is the one that was escaping – you can see the kink where it was deformed by the drainage hole; the other one was bent as it hit the bottom of the pot.



Erythronium purpurescens is a high altitude species and I do not find it easy to grow. I have a few in the garden and two pots; all raised from seed but I struggle to get them to flower as beautifully as they do in the wild.



Erythronium klamathense is more amenable and grows well; flowering and setting seeds most years in both the garden and in the plunge baskets.



Likewise, **Erythronium citrinum** is happy in our garden.



Erythronium bulbs replace themselves every year - the stem rises from the centre of the bulb and a new one forms to the side. The old bulbs do not die away completely but remain as a small attachment at the base of the bulb forming a chain, much like a rhizome.



These chains are more obvious in some species like **Erythronium montanum** above.



Erythronium montanum bulb

This *Erythronium montanum* bulb shows the new bulb and an offset at the base as well as the chain of previous years' bulbs. Also notice that it is already forming new roots and this, I think, is why many people struggle to grow this species successfully. In hotter drier areas these roots would die off as they do not get sufficient moisture in the summer and so the bulbs would fail.



We manage to grow *Erythronium montanum* in both baskets and the garden.



Erythronium elegans is very similar to *E. montanum* in both flower and bulb but has the advantage of rooting later and so it is easier to grow.



Erythronium dens-canis and its relatives also have prominent chains.



Erythronium dens-canis - Removing the chains does not harm the main bulb and if you do separate them, splitting them into individual links and plant them, each will form a new bulb.



These chains have evolved as an insurance so that if the main bulb with its dominant growth bud is destroyed, or removed, the latent buds on the chains are allowed to grow on and some chains can produce a number of bulbs.



Erythronium sibiricum – some bulbs will increase well forming two bulbs each year while others only ever form a single new bulb. Sadly the only way to increase some Erythroniums is by seed.



The plunge frame area looks in total chaos as I work my way through re-potting but order does return.



Once all the baskets are replanted I level the sand in the plunge.



The baskets are replaced and then I work more sand down between them so that they are all surrounded by sand. Later I will mulch the area with shredded prunings to retain moisture and inhibit weeds.



Erythronium seeds



As I work I remove any seed pods from the Erythroniums and store them complete with capsules in paper bags. It does not matter if the seed is brown or green as illustrated because they are now independent of the plant. The seeds will continue to develop for some weeks and the green ones will turn brown so it is important that you do not place them in a fridge too soon. I store my seed in the paper bags in a shaded potting shed until late August when I will soak the seed in water then sow them. Using this method I get a near 100 per cent germination the following spring.



Erythronium seeds



A first for us is getting a few seeds on our **Iris winogradowii**. We have only ever had a single clone and never before had seed so I am delighted that now we have the chance to raise some new stock.



Along with Miss Lily I have another helper as I re-pot the bulbs – a young Robin.....