



BULB LOG 10..... 6th March 2013

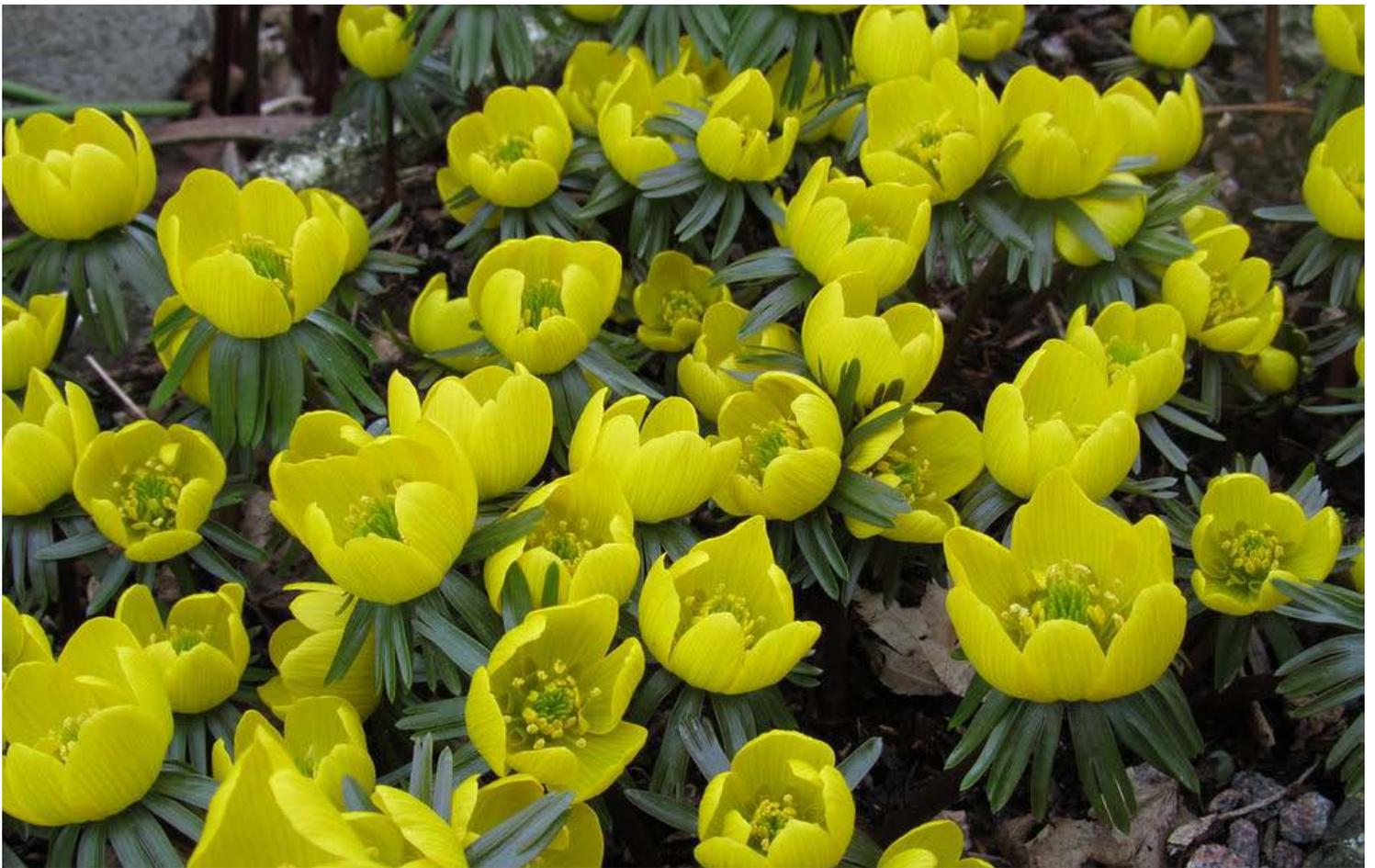


'If I only I knew then what I know now' - they say you need two lifetimes as a gardener one to learn and one to do. How true that is - if I was starting out again I would make many more bulb beds, like the one above, of nothing but



sharp sand. Nearly every bulb I have tried in these beds so far has grown extremely well Fritillaria, Crocus, Narcissus, Galanthus are among those enjoying the sandy medium above. The rest of our garden has a well drained sandy soil enriched by years of our own compost to make a well drained humus rich medium which proves ideal for the moister woodland type of bulbs we grow.

I had been unable to get out in the garden for a few days which had been mild and sunny so when I did make my first foray I was delighted to be greeted by a flush of early spring flowers. The flowers on Eranthis hyemalis which had been in tight bud were open - soaking up the sunshine.



Groups of *Eranthis* 'Guinea Gold' are also now in flower.



Here, in a bulb bed, a small clump of *Eranthis* 'Guinea Gold' is towered over by some *Galanthus* of various statures which are springing up all around the garden – *Crocus* and *Iris* can also be seen.



In this view it is the white flowers of the Galanthus that dominate the scene for the moment, although the group in the distance to the right of the path are Leucojum. I am not keen on 'clump planting' I prefer drift plantings that lead your eye around the scene. If I could I would split up every bulb that forms a clump every few years and replant them individually to keep more in tune with what I see in nature.



Here each Galanthus stem and flower has its own space. The group on the right are increasing well and will form a clump so I would look to split them in a few years. Likewise Iris 'Katharine Hodgkin' forms clumps and after three years the flowers get too congested to be enjoyed individually so are also best when regularly spaced apart.



Mixed Galanthus



Above, especially for my friends with the white fever, I show another group of Galanthus still nicely spaced out. As the Snowdrop galas and gatherings come towards an end in the south of the country enthusiasts should slowly migrate North following the white haze as flowering is always much later in the far north.

If they do make it up this far I could show them a real early flowering beauty with white flowers in the shape of **Erythronium caucasicum**. Very slow to form clumps this one is slowly increasing but to get any quantity I rely on getting seed to set and then the long wait of 5 to 7 years for them to achieve flowering size.



***Erythronium caucasicum*.**



***Iris histrioides* 'Major'**



Iris reticulata forms



Crocus tommasinianus, Corydalis and Cyclamen coum

A pleasing mix of *Crocus tommasinianus*, *Corydalis* and *Cyclamen coum* are growing happily in another of my sand bulb beds. Regular readers will know of my struggle to establish *Cyclamen coum* in our garden with any success, it is so frustrating to see it growing so rampantly in many gardens in the south, my best results to date are in this sand bed where I simply buried some *Cyclamen coum* seed. Now I have a number of plants growing normally and managing to flower normally so I am hopeful that I may at last have found somewhere in our garden they will settle down.



Crocus abantensis



Crocus kosaninii and Crocus dalmaticus

Moving into the bulb houses to see what is in flower there I find a number of Crocus species have sprung into flower.



Crocus 'Hubert Edelsten'

Three pictures now of Crocus 'Hubert Edelsten' one of my favourite forms of *Crocus sieberi* with very dark exteriors that reveal a further spectacular display of colour when the flowers open.





A group of *Crocus sieberi* subsp. *sieberi* seedlings



A nice white form of *Crocus pestalozzae* which I have always thought shares similarities in both looks and growth to *Crocus x jessoppiae*, named by E.A.Bowles, shown in the picture below.



Crocus x jessoppiae



Merendera trigyna

Notice how the floral segments remain separate all the way down below the flower, almost thread like, distinct from *Colchicums* where they fuse into a tube immediately below the flower. This was how I recognised the difference between these two genera which have now all been merged under *Colchicum*.

The Narcissus are in full swing in the bulb house now making a fabulous display. Pictured below are *N. romieuxii*, *N. mesatlanticus*, *N. cantabricus foliosus* and *N. 'Camoro'*, among others, all of which have started into flower in October for at least the previous ten years – this year they are in full flower now some five months later. I was dismayed to read in the advice section of the latest issue of the RHS 'Garden' magazine the words 'dead head spring bulbs as their flowers go over, to channel growth into the bulb for next year's display'.



It is accompanied with a picture of a Narcissus seed head about to be pinched off by someone's fingers. This is one of these regurgitated old hat bits of so called advice that is so wrong for a number of reasons. Firstly any transferable disease or virus would be quickly spread throughout all your plants if you were to dead head them in this way - but more importantly the reasoning is totally wrong. Many Narcissus cultivars do not set seed anyway despite the fact that the capsule may swell. I have proved many



times that a bulb setting seed will grow for four to six weeks longer than one that is not fertile or pollinated and this extra period of growth more than makes up for the extra energy required of the plant to produce some seeds. Secondly we should be encouraging as many people as possible to be growing bulbs from seed either by allowing them to naturalise in situ or by sowing seeds into containers or seed beds to keep a healthy vigorous stock of plants coming on for future plantings.

The advice should read-feed your spring flowering bulbs with sulphate of potash as the

flowers fade making sure they are well watered as they enter this critical stage of growth where the bulb makes next year's flowers, and adds to its stored food reserves before going into summer dormancy. Also remember to collect

the seed to sow or share. I can never overstate the value of raising plants from seed. Named cultivars need to be raised from division but would never have existed if someone did not raise them from seed in the first place. Over years of dividing plants can lose their vigour perhaps just because of age or because they have picked up diseases along the way – when you split a bulb the offsets are not young bulbs but divisions of an old bulb.



Here I am holding a flower of **Narcissus ‘Camoro’** next to my **select seedling** from it to show the different shape and size to the flowers. I like ‘Camoro’ but I like this seedling even better.



Narcissus ‘Craigton Bell’

Here is another of my seed raised plants - a hybrid between *Narcissus bulbocodium* and *N. romieuxii* which displays all the vigour and flower power that comes with young seed raised plants.



Narcissus 'Minicycla' x Narcissus cyclamineus.

I find Narcissus 'Minicycla' a miffy plant that can do well for a few years and then it takes a step back again so I crossed it back onto one of its original parents *Narcissus cyclamineus* and for now I have a pot of similar but vigorous plants. Another cross I raised from seed is between *Narcissus perez-chiscanoi* and *N. cyclamineus*, below, but it was the bees not me that transferred the pollen I just recognised the cross when the seedlings reached flowering size.



Narcissus perez-chiscanoi x *N. cyclamineus*

Narcissus cantabricus petunoides

These last two pictures for this week are of a legendary bulb that we must endeavour to keep going by seed as well as by division. *Narcissus cantabricus petunoides* from Jim Archibald is a selected very flat-faced petunioide form that can be raised from seed provided you select the resulting seedlings and only apply the name to those that are truly petunioide. The others are perfectly nice forms of *Narcissus cantabricus* worth growing on in their own right.

Seed rules OK.....

