



BULB LOG 36.....4<sup>th</sup> September 2013



**Bulb house**

September the first is, for me, the start of the bulb year and that is the day I always apply the first storm.



All the pots are thoroughly soaked - I flood each pot in turn with water allowing them to drain then flooding again until I am sure that all the compost within the pot and the sand of the plunge are completely soaked. This method is important to ensure that there are no air pockets or dry spots within the compost. If you check the weather forecasts of the Mediterranean bulbous regions around now you will see autumn rain storms are the norm around this time and that is what the bulbs have evolved to respond to. I believe that it is not the water that triggers the bulbs to emerge from the summer rest but the temperature gradient which comes on the cooler autumn nights - of course the cool heavy rains add to the falling ground temperature. The bulbs react by initiating the emergence of the root tips and provided there is water available the roots will quickly grow out into the moist ground.



### **New plunge**

Over many years I have got a routine but changing any of the many parameters may mean I have to adapt my watering regime and this year I have completely new plunges. I now have to learn how much watering I will need to apply to with this new set up to ensure the sand plunge is wet all the way through and learn how the new drainage system will work.



I watered the plunge with the 7cm pots by hand using a 5Litre watering can so that I knew exactly how much water I added.



Just as I do with my hose I flooded each pot at least three times and left them to drain.



As the new plunges come in square sections I can water each section independently and with the new drainage system that I described a few weeks ago I can collect and measure the water that drains out. I added 15 litres of water to the first section and collected 6.5L from the drainage. I was not able to tell how much water drained away in my old plunges as it just soaked into the lower sand plunge but now I can get a guide of just how much water is being retained in the plunge and pots.



**Colchicum alpinum**

The first flower to appear in the newly refurbished 7cm plunge was *Colchicum alpinum*.

A pure white flower emerged and when I went back to look at it some hours later I noticed that it had a pink flush, perhaps I not observed it properly? Next day it was pinker still with only the tips being white.

When a second flower emerged I was able to see that I had been correct and it is pure white when it emerges. The pink flush develops as the flower is exposed to light and intensifies in colour.

**Colchicum alpinum**





**Colchicum alpinum**



**Colchicum montanum**

Colchicum montanum is another of the first bulbs to flower in our bulb-house. Both of these species will flower without any water being applied. As with many of the larger colchicum species these flower very early in the season, often before the rains come so they are supported by the moisture stored within the bulb. The roots will emerge when moisture is available then the leaves will come.

I knew this species as Merendera montana before it was reclassified.



### **Colchicum checked hybrid**

The first Colchicum to flower in the garden is this beautiful checked hybrid. Interestingly it is this group that I grew in a deep polystyrene box that flower first – before there is any sign of the same plant in the open beds. I speculate that as they are in a relatively small volume of compost exposed in a box there is a bigger swing in temperature than in the more stable conditions of the garden and so they experience the temperature gradient that I believe initiates the growth in bulbs after the summer rest before those in the garden.





**Crocus nudiflorus**

If you read the bulb log when I was re-potting the Erythronium plunge baskets you will know that I allow various Crocus species to cohabit in the baskets. Now I am rewarded as the sand plunge has a scattering of Crocus nudiflorus flowers to give interest through the autumn.

**Crocus nudiflorus**



### **Crocus vallicola**

*Crocus vallicola* is another of the early flowering species and one of my favourites in this glorious genus. There was no sign of this flower at all one day - then twelve hours later it was up and open as shown below.



The flower was fully formed in miniature last spring and all it had to do was expand - this great adaptation to come into flower so rapidly has made bulbs of all kinds so successful.



**Crocus  
kotschyanus  
suworowianus**

Crocus kotschyanus suworowianus looks quite similar to the previous species and it could be difficult to tell them apart if they were in a mixed planting.

I think however that the different shape of the flower and the absence of the internal coloured markings would allow me to identify this species from *C. vallicola*



Most flowers in the garden are provided by the many forms of **Cyclamen hederifolium** that are blooming and attracting masses of hoverflies that seem to always appear at the same time as the autumn bulbs start to flower.



**Cyclamen  
hederifolium  
album**



We have *Cyclamen hederifolium* growing in full sun, partial shade and the ones above are in almost full shade. Their stems are drawn up as they reach out for the light and I had to cut back some self-seeded *Aconitum* to give the *Cyclamen* some space.



The view as seen by the Cyclamen in the picture above - looking upwards to the sky seen through a canopy of Hamamelis and Acer.



Last week we felt the cool temperatures of autumn were upon us but this week we have been surprised by the return of hot sunny conditions. Monday was only a fraction of a degree away from the hottest day of the year and Aberdeen temperatures exceeded those of all the European holiday resorts. Sitting in the garden I was aware of two swarms - one was the hoverflies which appeared in huge numbers and the other, which was less welcome, was what appeared to be a snow storm of Epilobium seeds floating everywhere in the garden. I knew these seeds were not from our garden and I was wondering which of our neighbours was responsible for not controlling this weed until I drove a mile and a half to the supermarket and saw that the whole area was thick with these floating Epilobium seeds. Now that is a successful plant.....