



BULB LOG 03.....21st January 2015



Narcissus eualbidus



Helleborus seedling



I have been taking advantage of the recent good weather we have had to get on with bigger tasks. The five trees at the top of the garden are now down - this will let much more light in to the border below our southern wall as well as other areas of the garden. The low winter sun never rose above the height of these trees but now they are away we can enjoy what sunlight we get. For a number of days the skies were blue but it was cold with temperatures hovering around freezing also strong winds moving through.

Other winter jobs are lifting more of the late falling leaves and tidying back the old growths to allow the spring growth to come through unhindered.

As I tidy around I find all sorts of delights such as this lone snowdrop catching the sunlight in front of a winter green fern.

It is always a point of discussion whether you should cut back plants which retain their leaves such as ferns, hellebores, Epimedium, Hepatica, etc.

My view is I like to enjoy the structure the green growth brings to the winter beds for as long as I can but there comes a point when it can affect the new growth that will soon emerge so now is the time I remove that old season's growth.

In this picture you can see a number of ferns and hellebores with still-green leaves – compare this with the picture below after I have cut off last year's leaves and lifted the fallen leaves. I used my garden vac to lift and shred these fallen leaves before returning them as a mulch. The hellebore and fern leaves go to the compost heap.



Before



After



It is interesting to speculate what happens in the wild where there is no gardener to cut back the old leaves. My first thoughts are that maybe the climate and environmental conditions in the wild do not allow the leaves to survive through the winter. Even if they do survive the old leaves may flop outwards opening up the centre of the plant where the new growth emerges - as on this pale yellow flowered hellebore.



With the old leaves removed we can fully appreciate the mass of new flower shoots.



A single red flowered Helleborus seedling enjoys the cold winter sunshine.



As I lifted the fallen leaves I reveal these **Eranthis hyemalis** shoots along with germinating seeds – I am always amazed at how they are able to grow in such cold winter conditions and wonder what exactly triggers their growth.



A pot of *Eranthis* comes into flower in one of the open frames – but now I have moved it into one of the bulb houses to better enjoy the flowers.



I also moved all our pots of *Eranthis pinnatifida* from the open frame into the bulb house both to encourage good growth, flowering and hopeful a good seed set. I am also more able to protect them from being eaten by slugs, snails or the odd bird that is curious about these emerging shoots – something has already taken the top off of one of these shoots. This plant has now lost its leaves so will not grow so well but the remaining stem can support the tuber through the year.



Working out what triggers plants into growth is a fascinating topic – we know that for many it is temperature with much seed germinating at temperatures in excess of 15C but what exactly stimulates these early seeds to germinate is not so evident. Typically the seeds germinate as mature plants also come into growth so the trigger is genetically passed down the generations. I do believe that a ‘time window’ exists where, if seed is sown in that time frame then it will go onto germinate. For many bulbs that time window is from late summer to midwinter. Seed sown outside that window period may not germinate for a whole year because it has to be sown so that it passes through the time window. The above pot of *Allium platycaule* was sown as soon as I received the seeds last February, however no germination occurred that year. Now the pot has come through the time window period I am getting good germination. Many of you will be currently receiving bulb seeds from various exchanges so these seeds, if they are of the early growing bulbs, will most likely not germinate until next year. Plants like many summer flowering Lilies, *Nomocharis* and the like have a different growth cycle these are best sown now and will germinate in a few months’ time. *Colchicum* seed has always mystified and frustrated me, I cannot work out a way to get quick or reliable germination- this pot was sown inside the time window in September 2013 and is only now germinating.



Here is a pot of Crocus seed, also sown last February, which has sat outside all year and is now germinating.



A yellow Crocus, most likely *Crocus chrysanthus*, shows that it is not always possible to know what you are collecting from seed – as this was thought to be *C. biflorus* seed. It is a lovely form with a nice dark purple tube.



Crocus biflorus



Galanthus 'Ramsay' is a really nice small snowdrop introduced by Ian Christie.



In the bulb house **Narcissus bulbocodium** forms and hybrids continue to delight.



Narcissus bulbocodium

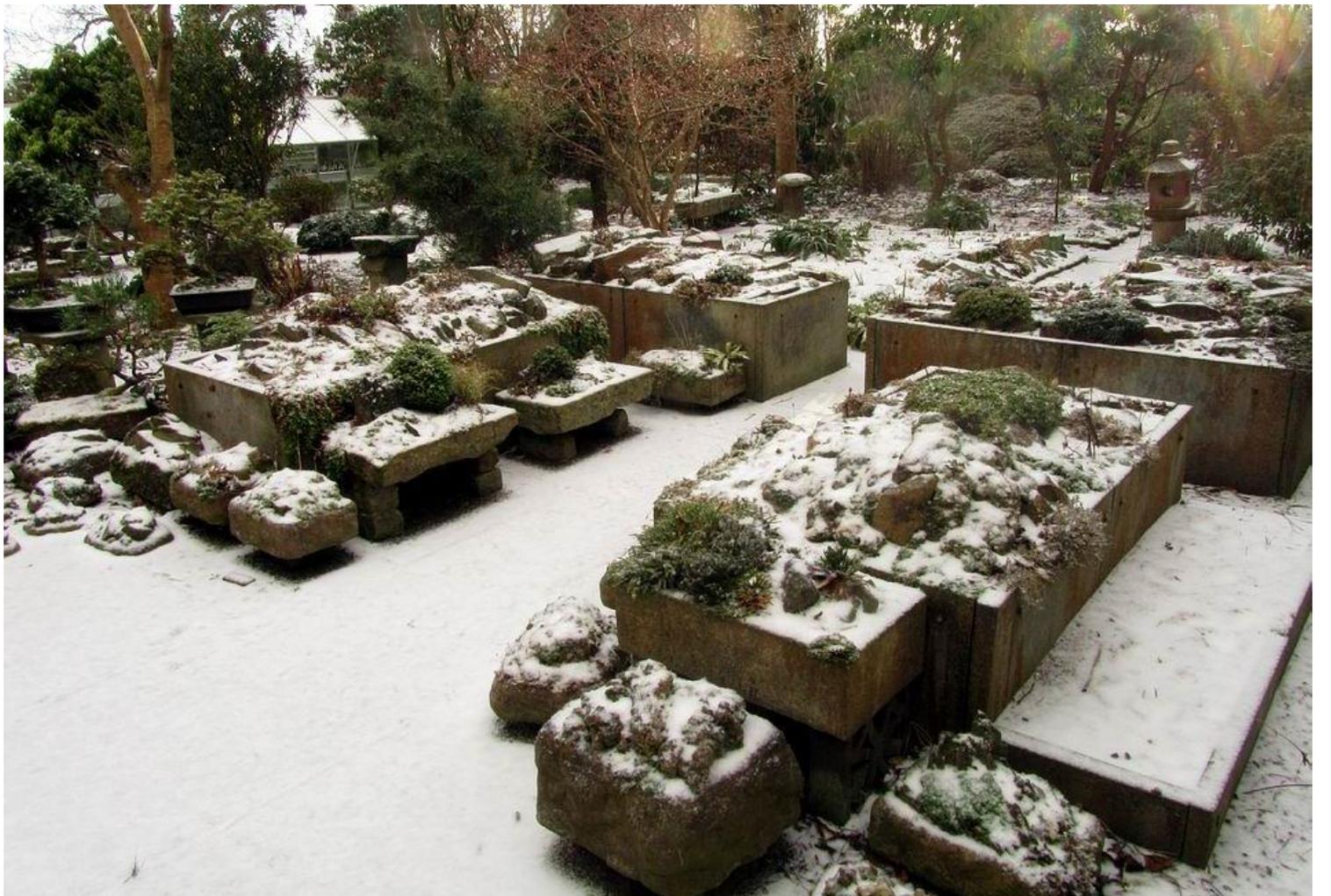


Narcissus bulbocodium seedling

I raised this seedling from seed set on a *Narcissus bulbocodium* form originally collected in Morocco – it was open pollinated so I am not sure that it has not hybridised. It is one of my favourites with good shape and a dark crystal yellow colour – note also the hair like tips to the petals that we see on many bulbs.



Having started this log describing the fine weather it has now turned very cold with daily temperatures struggling to get above freezing and a light covering of snow so outside work has stopped.





There is a saying 'like peas in a pod' meaning how similar they are – the seeds may look alike but the flowers raised will differ in both looks and tolerance as demonstrated by these three seedlings from a single pod.....