



BULB LOG 46.....18<sup>th</sup> November 2015

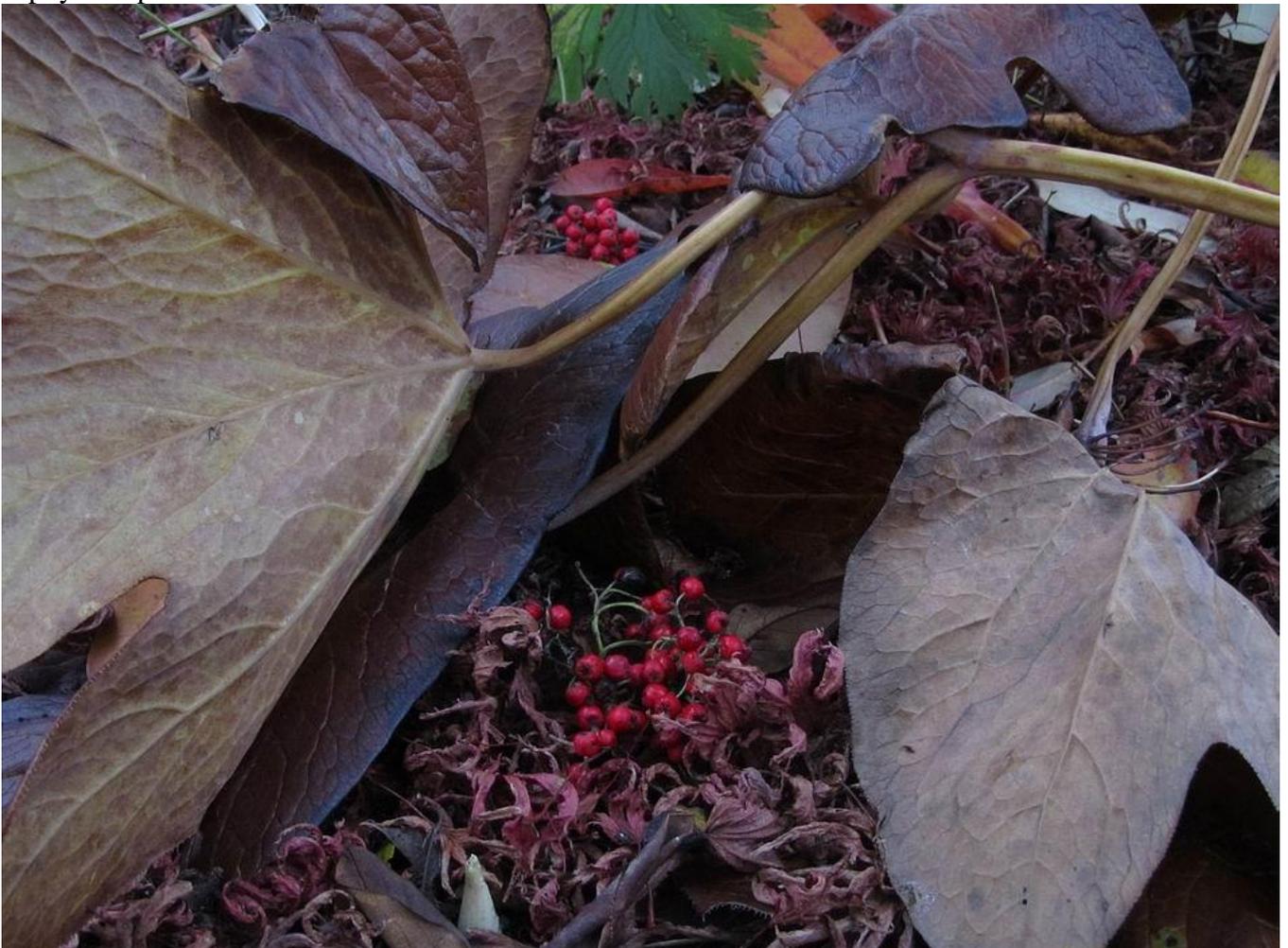
Includes a chapter from  
*Erythroniums in Cultivation*  
on *Erythronium japonicum*



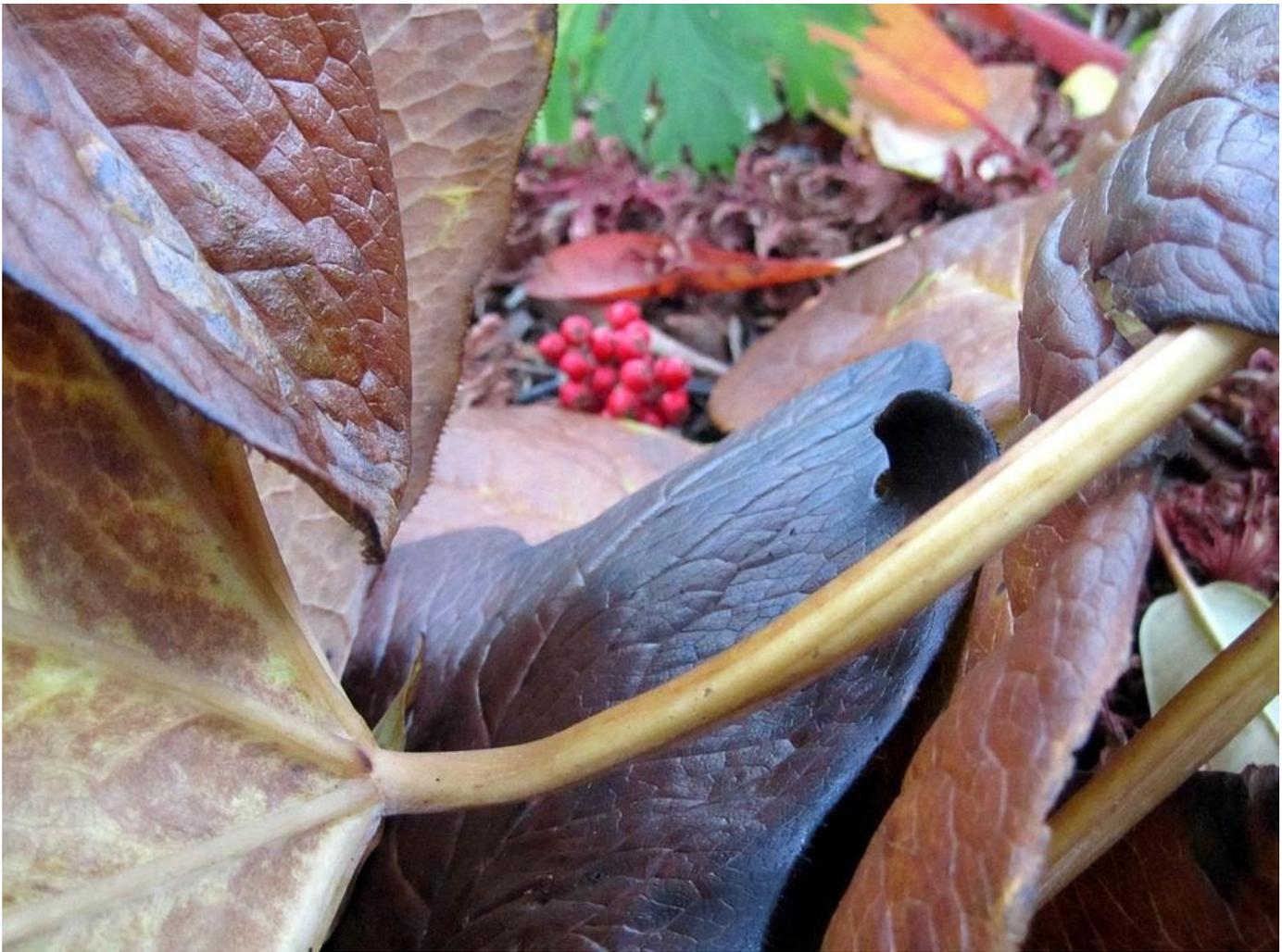
As the herbaceous plants prepare themselves for winter we can still enjoy the leaves as they slowly decay. The cover shows the leaves of *Cardiocrinum giganteum* in the foreground and *Podophyllum pleianthum* behind.



As I move in with my camera I find an almost infinite number of images can be selected of the now brown leaves of *Podophyllum pleianthum*.



Their structure ensures these leaves retain a good deal of strength creating lovely shapes and forms.



The closer I move in the more abstract the image can become and playing with focus allows me some control of how the viewer's eye will perceive the picture. In this image your eye is initially drawn to the red berries then on discovering they are out of focus it is redirected to the area on the left where the focus is sharp the curving stems then encourage your eye to move around exploring the image.



Less detail and more abstraction.



The internal structure of the *Cardocrinum giganteum* leaves is much weaker so these leaves are quite floppy but still offer lots of opportunities for you to get out and close with your camera.

Below, the collapsed and withering flowers of *Colchicum aggripinum* make interesting shapes on the fallen leaves.



Now the rest of this Bulb Log is the chapter from *Erythroniums in Cultivation* on *Erythronium japonicum*.....

*Erythronium japonicum*





### **Erythronium japonicum**

I got my first bulb of *Erythronium japonicum* From Inschriach Nurseries many years ago and while it came up and flowered most years it never set any seed - that bulb has taken some twenty or more years to form the small group on the left. Our next acquisition came about fifteen years ago when I saw bulbs being offered online from China so I ordered a small quantity. These bulbs eventually arrived at the end of December – they were in terrible condition, dried out with many also broken and I did not hold out much hope of growth. I soaked them in some water overnight to rehydrate them then planted all the parts into a pot. Three survived to flower and with careful pollination I got two seed capsules.

When I did some research I discovered that in Japan they are called Katakuri and the starch from the bulbs was used as a thickening agent in cooking. I have often wondered if that explains the poor condition of the bulbs that I received – were they originally intended to be sold for starch?



**Erythronium japonicum stems and seed capsules**



I was determined to get the best results from these seeds so I sowed them in a polystyrene fish-box trough and we even went to the length of buying a temporary plastic greenhouse to house them when they came into flower to maximize the chance of good pollination and seed set.



The flowers were all in shades of violet/pink with very attractive and variable dark purple zig-zag markings towards the centre of the flower.



While there was some variation in the colour and the markings, the filaments were all similar in shape with more or less parallel sides tapering towards the end by the anthers. The end of the style, the stigma, is divided to form three areas receptive to pollen.



While the anthers are dark violet the pollen colour can vary in hue, some appearing almost cream when fully ripe.



**Erythronium japonicum flower detail**

## Seed



Like all of the Eurasian group, **Erythronium japonicum** seed have elaiosomes, this time in the form of a blunt tip making it quite distinct from the others in this group.



**Erythronium japonicum** seed



**caucasicum, sibiricum and japonicum** seeds

I sow the seed as soon as it is ripe, placing the seed pots/containers into an open frame exposed to the weather so it never dries out - any dried seed should be soaked in water over night before sowing.

Germination starts in the spring but in my experience the seed of this species, more than any of the others, always germinates sporadically. I do not know if this is down to my cultivation methods or if it is an evolutionary strategy for survival, spreading germination to more than one season – I suspect it is the latter .



### Seedlings

This is a typical pot of seedlings pictured in spring of their second year – the narrow leaves are seeds just germinating having remained dormant for more than a year while the larger ones are the second year leaf of the bulbs that germinated during their first spring.

The markings on the leaves do not reveal themselves fully until the plants are mature, after around five years of growth.



### Leaf



The two plain green leaves shown are on bulbs that are probably two years away from flowering while the unusually large leaf on the right in the picture is typical from a bulb that will flower next spring - note also how the markings have now developed on the most mature leaf.



This group of seedlings shows a range of ages: the narrow single leaves being the least mature, the broad leaves indicate that they are a year off flowering and the bulb with the flower has the typical two leaves of a mature plant. Flowering plants will always have two leaves; a single leafed plant will not flower.



These are typical markings of a mature plant, they are superficially similar to the other Eurasian species but with experience you will start to be able to recognise them – the contrast between the colours is less in *Erythronium japonicum* and they often appear as if they are covered by a transparent grey wash.



Erythronium japonicum leaf showing colour variation.

**Bulb**



The bulbs are also typical of the Eurasian group with the attached chains being the remnants from previous years.



I find that *Erythronium japonicum* bulbs do not divide readily, however if left for long enough they will produce secondary growths. Removing the chains from the parent bulb and growing them on separately will stimulate the chains to produce new clonal bulbs - this does not harm the parent bulb.



It is hard to pick a favourite *Erythronium* out of all the species but the flower colour and dramatic markings makes *Erythronium japonicum* difficult to beat.



Above and below are pale and darker colour variations - all are equally desirable.  
Note how the style and filaments of the dark form also reflect the deeper colour.





*Erythronium japonicum* grows well in our garden in exactly the same conditions as *Erythronium dens-canis*. I have not yet raised a form that will form clumps at any speed so seed remains the main method of increasing our stocks.





**Erythronium japonicum** is becoming more readily available, it is offered by a number of specialist nurseries and bulb sellers.