



BULB LOG 35.....2nd September 2015





I love **Lilium nepalense**; a plant we used to grow when we were first creating new beds in the garden their bulbs enjoyed the freshly dug organic-rich conditions. They did not always come up where expected as they produce underground stems that run around before sending up a flower stem. As our trees and shrubs became more established their roots prevented us digging in the annual mulch from the compost heaps which now had to be spread on the surface and Lilium nepalense dwindled and disappeared. Last autumn I took the opportunity of the reworked front garden to plant some bulbs into the humus rich holes left by the removal of shrub roots.

Lilium nepalense

The graceful arching stem, which in this case is further weighed down by Tropaeolum speciosum, is topped off with the most elegant funnel shaped flower with recurved tips reminding me of a classical roof line on a Chinese temple or palace.

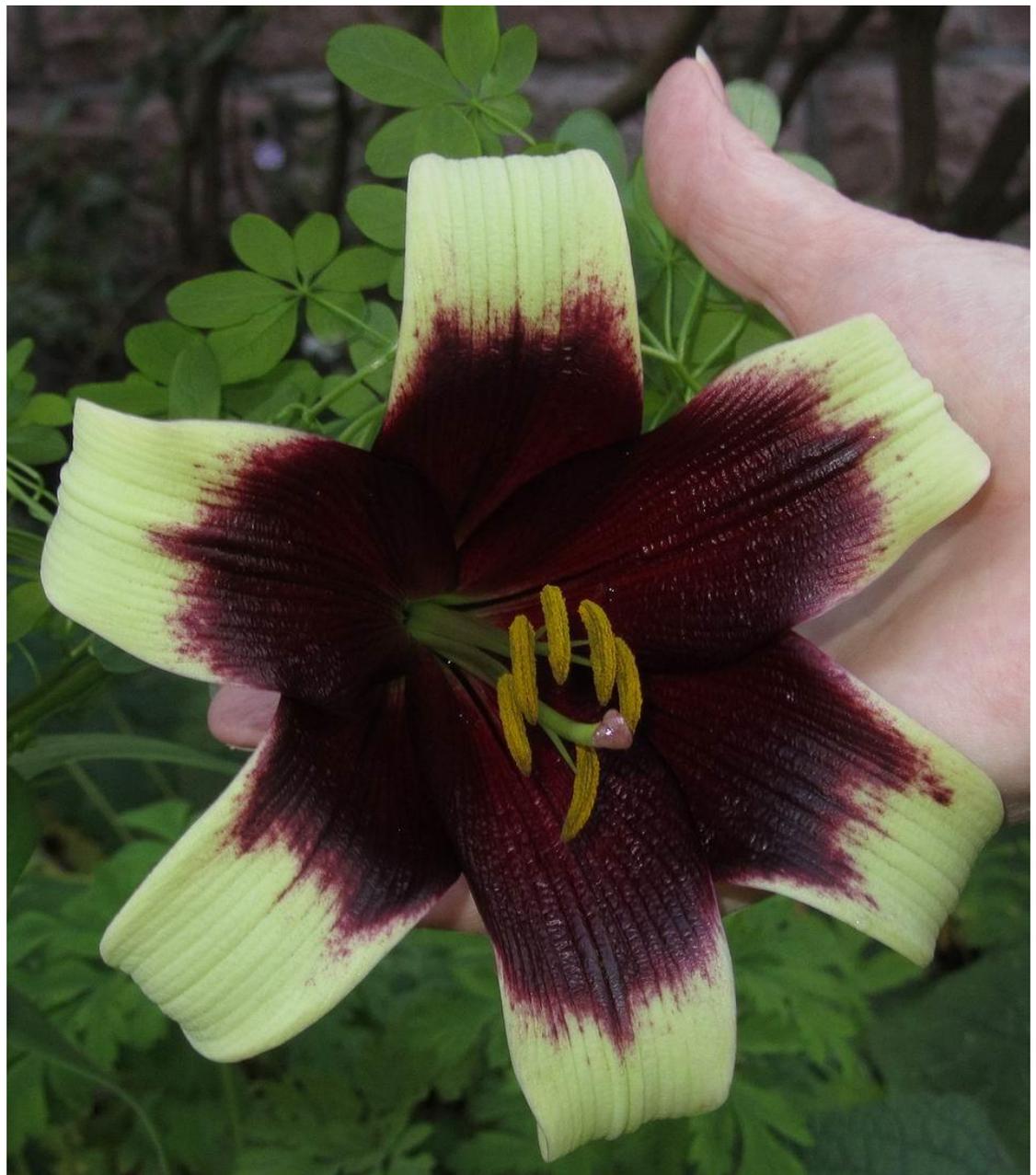
The dramatic effect is further enhanced if you tilt the flower to see the stunning dark colour.

Gardening, like life, presents us with a series of choices - from these we need to take decisions which in turn are dependent on the time we have and our ability.

My way has always been to observe, analyse and then take the appropriate action. I do not always have the time to take action, also as we get older our ability to carry out the heavier work diminishes – ironically at the same time our knowledge and understanding increases.

Our late friend and mentor

Harold Esslemont used to tell us that gardeners need two lifetimes - one to learn and one to do.





I do not normally re-pot seedling bulbs in their first year after germination, preferring to leave them until at least the end of their second year of growth however I did tip out this pot of **Allium platycaule**. I took particular notice of the depth that the bulbs had taken themselves down to, almost the bottom of the 8cm deep plastic pot, and replanted them back at the same depth. Ideally I would like to re-pot all the bulbs every year but we grow so many in pots that, along with all the other garden work, I can no longer manage them all. I try and work through systematically so they get done perhaps every two or three years – some of my special favourites will get favoured attention.



I believe it is the falling temperatures of Autumn that triggers the bulbs roots into growth and the temperature in our bulb house has been kept relatively high by a recent spell of sunshine, too high for me to work in during the day, so I have decided to delay the watering for about a week, giving me more time to catch up. The majority of the Fritillaria also seem to root later than the Narcissus so I re-pot them last.



Meconopsis seedlings

We have to be proactive in our decisions – I showed these Meconopsis seedlings, which have self-sown into the Erythronium sand plunge, a few weeks ago saying that I would not lift them until the spring growth appeared. Many rock garden plants come into growth and flower early in the year then to cope with hot dry summer conditions they go into a semi-dormant state– they then have a second period of growth as the temperatures fall and autumn rains come.

I have found that it is best not to disturb plants during the dry period however this year's cool wet summer has resulted in these Meconopsis growing on very well so I have chosen to lift and replant them into the garden now.



I have planted out around 100 of these young *Meconopsis* both in the front and back garden.

So much of the work in the garden is seasonal, concentrated into the summer and autumn months. With the re-potting of the bulbs, both under glass and in the *Erythronium* plunges, hedge cutting, tree pruning, weeding, etc. it can be difficult to get it all done so we have to decide which tasks can be left until later.



Growing so many trees means that we have to constantly reduce the canopy to allow us to have a healthy under planting of shrubs and bulbs. The view from our swing seat allows me to plan what branches I will remove to maintain an open canopy - fortunately I can do this pruning any time before the start of the spring growth.



I can also see a group of bonsai from the swing seat observing that they also need their summer trim and it is much quicker and easier to deal with these, no ladders or climbing involved, than the trees in the garden.



Molly gives you the scale of this bonsai which I try to style to look like a mature tree often using the large old Birch growing next door as a reference.



I took action and the tree is now clipped but I will continue to refine the shape during the winter months.



Another observation highlights one of the many ongoing tasks of trimming and pruning - **Chamaecyparis 'Green Globe'** is a very good dwarf conifer for the rock garden but they can produce growth that is out of character. Just as this cultivar was originally propagated from an abnormal dwarfed growth appearing on a parent tree it can also produce branches that revert back to the larger growing parent as I have outlined in the picture.



If you do not take action and remove these stronger growing branches they will eventually dominate the growth and you will lose this lovely dwarf form. This plant is at least thirty years old and every year, as well as removing any abnormal growths, I give it a general clip back in summer to further restrict its size.



A polystyrene box covered in sand makes a suitable home for cuttings. I have planted this one up with various dwarf Salix cuttings that I rooted under the mist unit. You may think I have forgotten my own advice here, by leaving it as a flat landscape, but my intention with this planting is that the growth of the willows will form the height as some will grow upwards while others will form ground hugging mats giving me the form that I want. There is one imposter that is not a Salix, can you spot which one it is?



Another group of plants just out of the mist unit are these cuttings of **Celmisia argentea** and **Celmisia sessiliflora**. I have potted them on as I am not yet sure in which trough or raised bed I will plant them. The cuttings were taken a few months ago from the parent plants growing in troughs in our garden.



Celmisia sessiliflora



Celmisia argentea



Saxifraga brunonis

While I have to work at propagating plants, like taking cuttings from *Celmisia*, others do it all themselves.

Saxifraga brunonis produces masses of runners that can search out and colonise nearby troughs, sometimes I do help them find a suitable home but those in this *Campanula* trough made it over from the adjacent trough all on their own.





Since the first plant reached this trough it has also sent out its many runners and as you can see they will root anywhere given the slightest encouragement such as in moss growing on the limestone rock.



Saxifraga sediformis



Saxifraga sediformis is closely related to the previous species but it does not produce such stolons.

The number of the rosettes on this plant has slowly increased forming a cluster and as with many saxifrages the rosette that produces a flowers stem dies off but new ones will form from the base.

We have flowered both of these species for a number of years but disappointingly to date we have never had any seed set.

We acquired them as small plants so we have only a single clone of each and perhaps they are not self-compatible needing to be pollinated from another clone.

This year I am attempting to get some seed by cross pollinating the two species and now I await hopeful of a few seeds – it could make an interesting hybrid.



You can see *Saxifraga sediformis* growing towards the bottom right of this picture.



I am continually learning from the plants and garden - this trough has been planted for a very long time and every year around this time a patch of slime mould forms near the left hand edge.



It always appears in the same spot and has never spread to other parts of the trough. I have never worked out what exactly causes it to grow only in this spot - at first I used to get annoyed by its presence but now I happily enjoy the short appearance each year of this fascinating plant - read more on [Slime mould](#).



The first of the flowers has appeared on this unnamed **Colchicum** species, grown from seed and are a timely reminder that I will need to crack on and get the pots in the bulb house tidied up so I can get them watered.



The flowers are white when they first appear but quickly take on a pink flush, also each bulb produces at least two flowers, you can see the second just appearing now.



In the garden **Crocus nudiflorus** is the first of this genus into flower