



BULB LOG 51.....21st December 2016



ERYTHRONIUMS IN CULTIVATION



The winter solstice has long been a time for celebration as we pass through the darkest day and the sun slowly climbs higher into the sky again. Evergreen trees have been adopted as a symbol and are commonly used to decorate our homes during the various winter festivals and so I share a pine tree in a raised bed on this week's cover. It is in winter that we can really appreciate the value of the many evergreen plants we grow – it is now while so many plants have shed their leaves and retreated under-ground that those that retain their leaves stand out. There are many to be found in our garden not least the silver leaved **Celmisia hectorii** growing on the wall which justifies its place in the

garden for the beauty of its foliage with the white daisy-like flowers being a bonus. As with all the matt forming Celmisia we grow I regularly take cuttings to propagate them - as a result we always have a number spread around the garden. Cuttings can be taken from new growth in the summer, when I root them under mist, but I have also taken cuttings in winter and placed the cutting directly into one of the humus beds where a reasonable proportion will root – this is how we raised the plant shown above.



I used exactly the same method with this plant of **Celmisia semicordata** – a year ago I removed a side shoot from the parent seed-raised plant in late autumn, peeled off some of the lower leaves to expose some stem then stuck it in situ.

Unlike the other seedlings of *Celmisia semicordata* I raised from the same seed this form had a congested growth producing many side growths – it may be that it is a hybrid.



This is the parent seed-raised plant and while there are some attractions in forming a cluster of growths it is not a good survival strategy. Without my intervention it would not survive in our wet conditions, the congested growth would retain too much moisture in the wet weather and without the

thinning of the growths and removal of the old leaves I fear it would rot away. Compare this plant with one of the other seedlings shown below which is much more typical of this species.



Celmisia semicordata



Corydalis 'Craigton Blue' is not an evergreen because it loses its leaves in late summer/autumn but then the new leaf growth starts as we head into winter and it will stay green despite the cold.



Many Cyclamen also produce new leaves in the autumn which stay green all the way through until next summer. Above is a mix of *Cyclamen coum* and *C. hederifolium* leaves with the coiled seed heads of the latter. These seedpods will take the best part of a year to mature before they are ready to spill their precious contents



The coiled seed-heads of *Cyclamen hederifolium* with the ivy-like (*Hedera*) leaves - the round leaves and the flower buds are of *Cyclamen coum*.



Cyclamen coum



**Cyclamen coum
flower buds.**

The seed of these autumn flowering Cyclamen take longer to mature than any other bulb I grow and another thing that fascinates me is that their flowers emerge lying flat on the ground long before they are mature and ready to sit up and open.



Silver leaved forms of **Cyclamen hederifolium** peak through the fallen carpet of leaves. I do not necessarily lift the leaves from all the beds it depends on a few things.



First the size of the leaf and how quickly it will break down - so I do remove the larger leaves of Acer 'Crimson King' which is the biggest leaf we have – you can see some of those in the picture of *Celmisia semicordata*. Where I leave the smaller leaves depends on what is growing in that bed – they have to be removed from any alpine beds or beds with low evergreen cushions that need light and air to survive.

I also remove them from beds where I am encouraging self-seeding - like much of gardening methods it comes down to common sense - a solid laminated mat of wet leaves lying on the surface is slow to break down, excludes light and inhibits seed germination. Even those seeds that do not require light to germinate will struggle to push their way through or past a thick matt of wet leaves.

Another method I often employ is to lift and shred the leaves then return them immediately as a mulch.

These *Galanthus* shoots can easily push through these smaller Acer, *Betula* and *Sorbus* leaves.





While it is mostly the smaller birch leaves that fall on this frame I do remove them because they provide hiding places for slugs which will feast on the new shoots that will emerge through the winter.



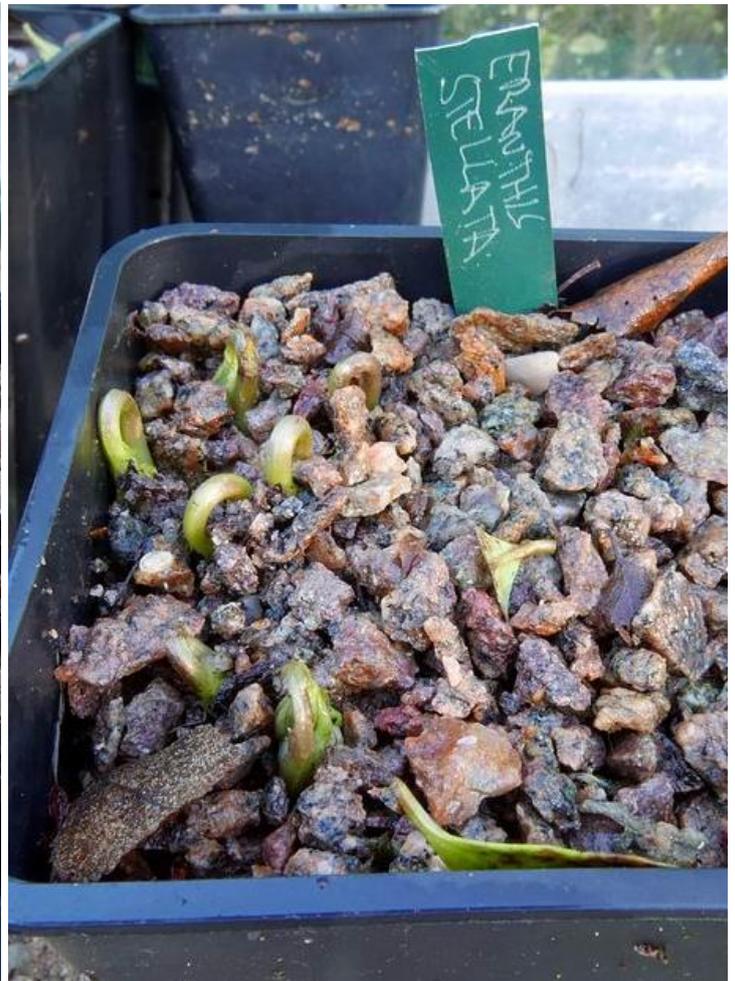
To show the importance of checking all frames on a regular basis I found these shoots on *Eranthis pinnatifida* while removing some leaves, I then quickly checked all the other pots.



Undoubtedly due to the mild December conditions we have experienced another pot of **Eranthis pinnatifida** is also in advanced growth. I have moved these under glass now where I can keep a better eye on them and most importantly keep them away from winter foraging slugs.



Eranthis sibirica



Eranthis stellata

As they are now in active growth I have added a small amount of NPK 7-7-7, the small grey pellets, to each of these pots to help their growth. I do not want to add a lot of nitrogen which would encourage soft growth but as these were not re-potted this summer a small trace of nitrogen in particular will aid a healthy root growth.



While weeding in the gravel drive I disturbed a few **Crocus seedlings** which illustrate newly germinating seeds as well as some first and second year seedlings.



**Crocus
laevigatus**

Forms of *Crocus laevigatus* growing in the bulb house continue to flower providing some welcome colour.



Bulbhouse sand bed

This picture allows you to compare the size of *Crocus laevigatus* with some of the hoop petticoat *Narcissus* - all growing in sharp sand in the bulb house sand bed.



This has been a slow start to the Narcissus season for us, most years I would expect many more to be in flower by now however the ones planted in the sand are now opening while the same plants in pots are still in bud.



These are all seed raised from our own seed so will mostly be hybrids between the like of *Narcissus bulbocodium*, *cantabricus* and *romieuxii*. When you throw away the labels, as I have done here, it makes you look more carefully at each flower to see the small variations between the different forms.



Narcissus and Crocus flowering in the sand bed.

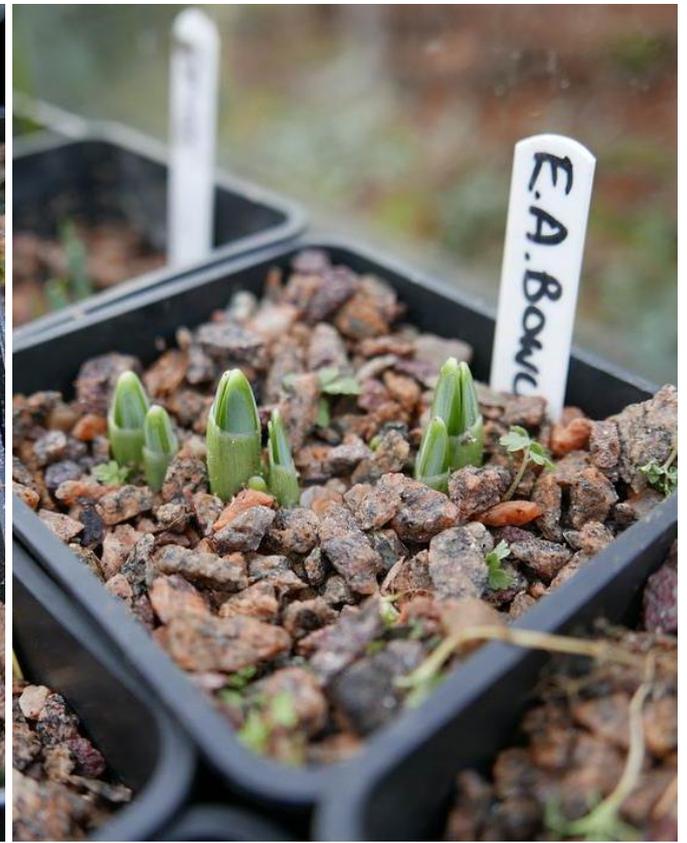


There are many more buds still to open in the coming weeks and months and it is a real delight to have these Narcissus flowers to help us through the winter.



Some forms have a beautiful long trumpet shape and are close to *Narcissus cantabricus monophyllus*, check back to [Bulb Log 5013](#) where I illustrate some of the key differences in these winter flowering narcissus.





There is so much to look forward to in the glasshouses during the winter months as illustrated by these fat Galanthus shoots which will soon produce their flowers (some of the Galanthus are afforded special treatment!)



Galanthus reginae-olgae flowering in the bulb house.

ERYTHRONIUMS IN CULTIVATION



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