



BULB LOG 47.....23rd November 2016





Our Narcissus flowering season starts off with the first few flowers appearing on **Narcissus cantabricus foliosus**, growing in the sand plunge; there are many more buds to come. It is tempting to use the commonly used term that this is later than normal but as I have never worked out what a normal season is I will refrain, however it has flowered earlier than this in some years. One thing I am certain of is that seed will germinate around the time the parent plants come into growth provided it was sown within the time window- which in this case is ideally by September. I sowed this seed of **Narcissus dubius** (left) in August half way down in the pot and now it is germinating well. I

know that many people worry about sowing Narcissus seeds deep fearing they will struggle to get their first leaf to the surface – I can assure you that not only will the leaf reach the surface but the first year bulbs will be stronger as a result. It is a very natural process for the leaves to extend towards the light – hence so many of our winter Narcissus etiolate in the low winter light. The young Narcissus bulbs form right beside the seed so if they are sown on the surface under a layer of gravel that is where they will spend the first year of their life. As growth starts again after the summer of the second year the young bulbs will then start to work their way down into the ground taking at least two more growing seasons to reach the depth that I sowed them at in the first place.



Bulbs have the ability to move deeper - I found this small Narcissus bulb almost at the surface of the sand. You can see the mass of feeding roots but towards the top there is one fat root – this is a contractile root that a bulb will produce if it needs to be growing deeper. The fat contractile root pushes down and anchors itself then as it goes dormant the root shrinks pulling the bulb downwards into the hole it has created in the soil. Many bulbs will also take on an elongated shape as part of this process like this Ipheion (left).

The top of this bulb is green because it was exposed to light allowing it to produce chlorophyll.



Even though it is early winter it is important to watch for aphids which can hatch during mild spells under glass. This is one of the pots of *Crocus vallicola* that I moved from the outside frame into the glass house so that I could enjoy the flowers and encourage a successful seed set and now the fresh young leaves are providing the perfect home for a fast expanding family of aphids. There is no need to revert to chemical sprays I literally wipe them out between my thumb and fingers.

I have also moved the pot back outside into the open frame where the freezing conditions should prevent any recurrence unless, that is, we get unseasonably mild weather.





Sternbergia leaves and *Galanthus reginae olgae* among other bulbs.



It is important to remember that even though it is winter these bulbs are growing needing both water and food to fuel their growth. Last week, using a half strength liquid tomato fertiliser, I watered all the pots with leaf growth - those with most leaves, such as the *Sternbergia* shown above, got a good soaking those with just a few green tips showing got a bit less.

Galanthus peshmanii



While many bulbs from a Mediterranean type climate are in the early stages of their annual growth others like these *Eucomis schijffii* and *E. autumnalis* are in retreat as their leaves die back. I keep these completely dry under the benches in the bulb house until I see signs of growth appearing in the spring then I give them a good watering.



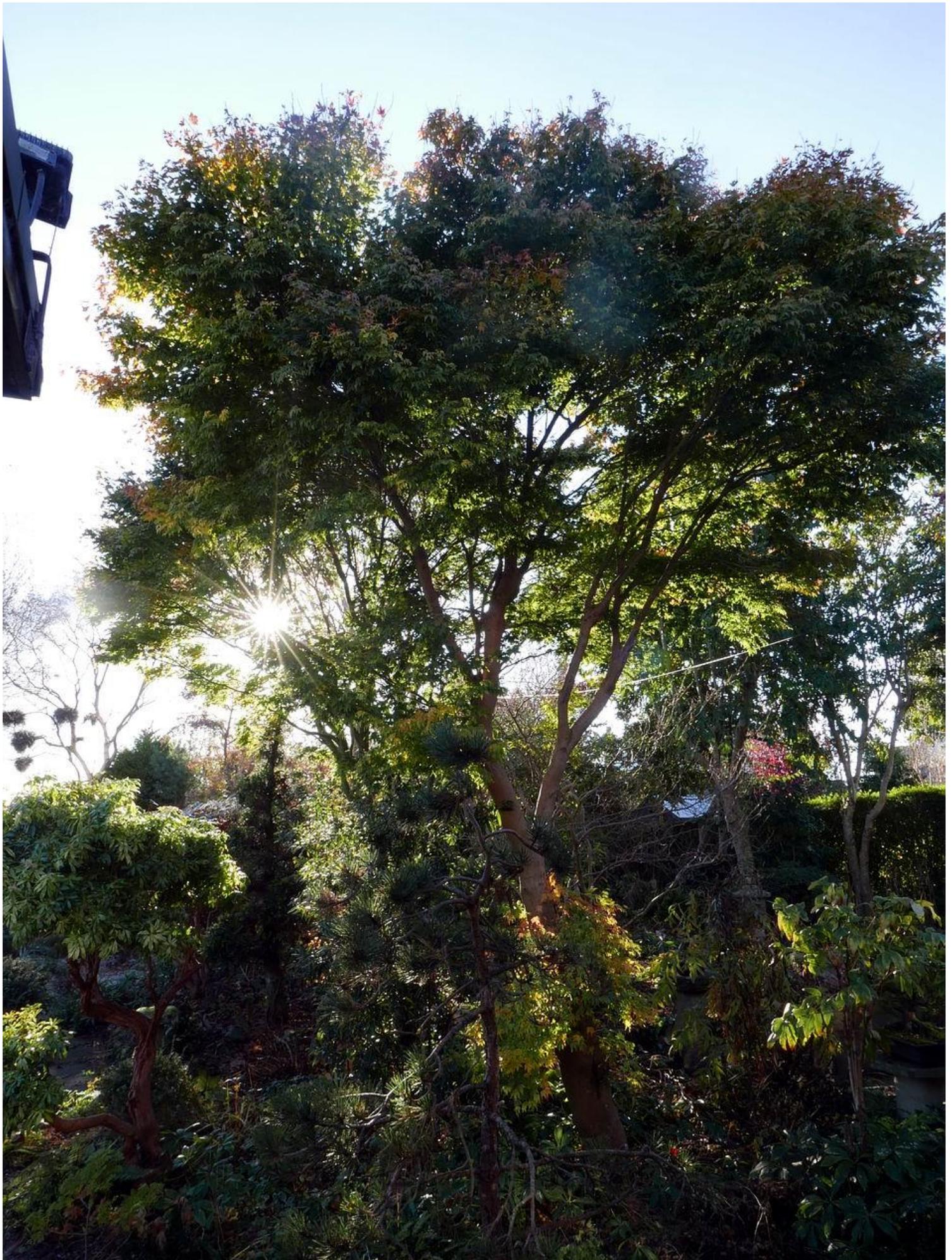
Also kept under the staging but in active growth is this box of ***Tropaeolum tricolorum***. These are extra tubers that I had left after potting. I just grow them in a polystyrene box in sharp sand that, like the other bulbs, gets watered in September. The growth makes its way towards the light then climbs up the wall providing natural shading.



Last December I received a pack of Cyclamen seed which I soaked in water then sowed in another polystyrene box also filled with nothing but sharp sand. Having missed the prime time window for sowing Cyclamen seed nothing germinated last season but now having come through a year they have passed through the time window and as a result germination has been triggered.



Clearing the leaves outside reveals a group of *Dicentra cucullaria* bulbs and bulbils sitting on the surface. I will not bury these but cover them with a mulch of leaf mould and/or composted shreds. This species flowers best when almost at the surface and if you plant them at any depth they will not flower well.



As the Bulb Log is a year-round garden diary I don't only share the garden when it looks colourful and full of flower but I also share this rather scruffy season as we enter winter and the herbaceous growth dies back. These two tall *Acer palmatum*s that I raised from seed hang on to their leaves for longer than most – they are only just turning colour now.



Although the temperature is -4°C and the ground is frozen solid there is no frost under the trees and shrubs (above) but a few metres away (below) the ground is white with frost.





Before the cold front came through I took a series of images of some beds that are full of spring bulbs so you can see what they look like as we head into winter.



Rock Garden bed



Bulb bed



I was able to lift more leaves before the freeze came and in addition I did some more pruning of the larger trees and shrubs, a process that will continue through the winter.



One advantage of this season is that I can make piles of prunings on the beds where all the growth has retreated underground until I get the time and suitable weather to bring out our shredder.



The stems of the *Cardocrinum giganteum* were blown over in a gale a few weeks ago but the seed pods are looking good and continuing to ripen.



Rhododendrons, Celmisia, Cassiope and other evergreen plants provide interest around this raised bed through the winter until the Erythroniums and other spring bulbs appear again.



A small Acer seedling with late-colouring leaves sits beside a conifer with a granite bench and mushroom behind.



A cold block of air swept down from the north causing our night time temperature to drop to -8°C and it barely rose above freezing for three days. Cyclamen leaves curl as the plant withdraws moisture to protect the cells being damaged in the freezing conditions.



A heavy frost forms across exposed areas of the garden that are not under trees.

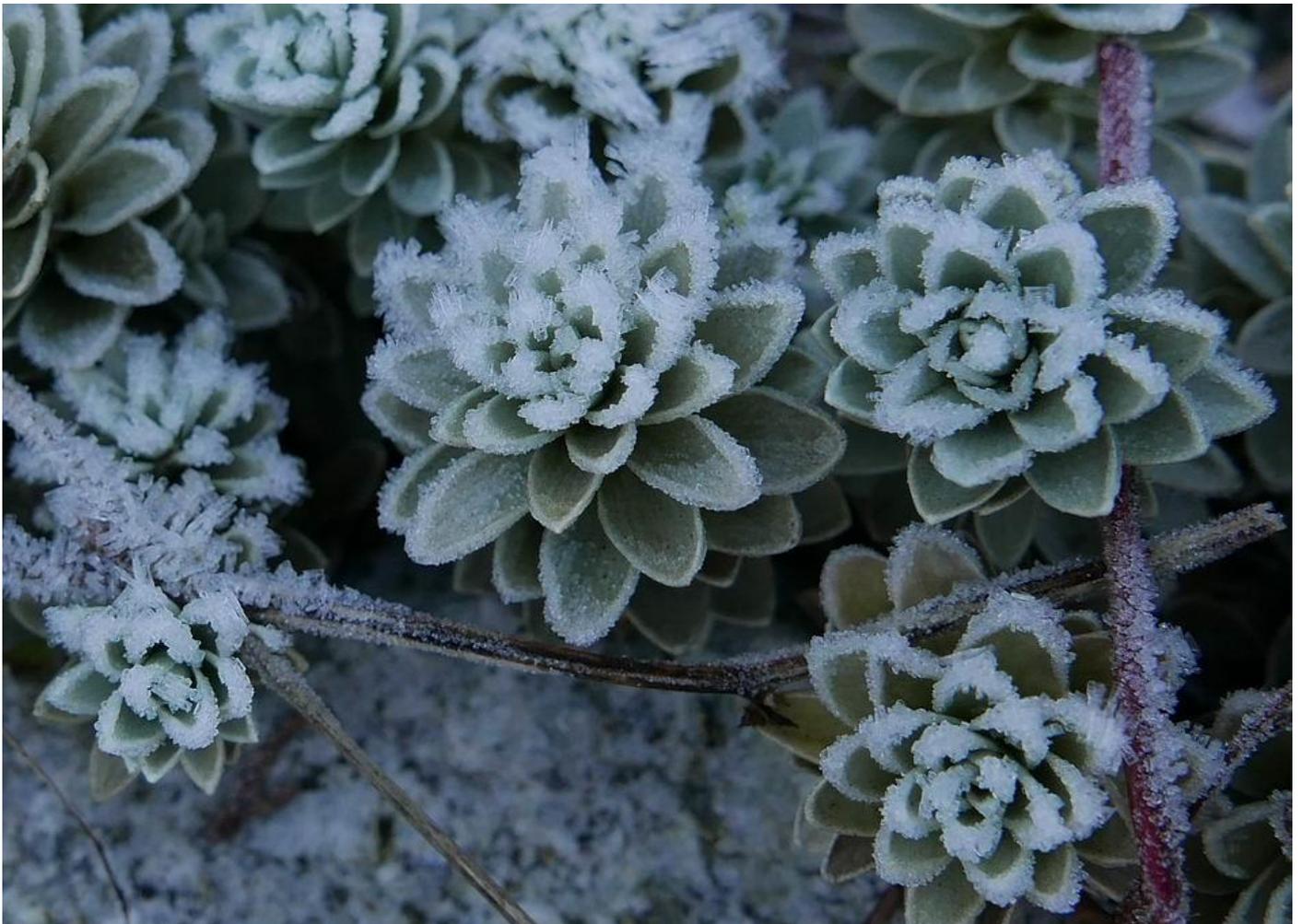


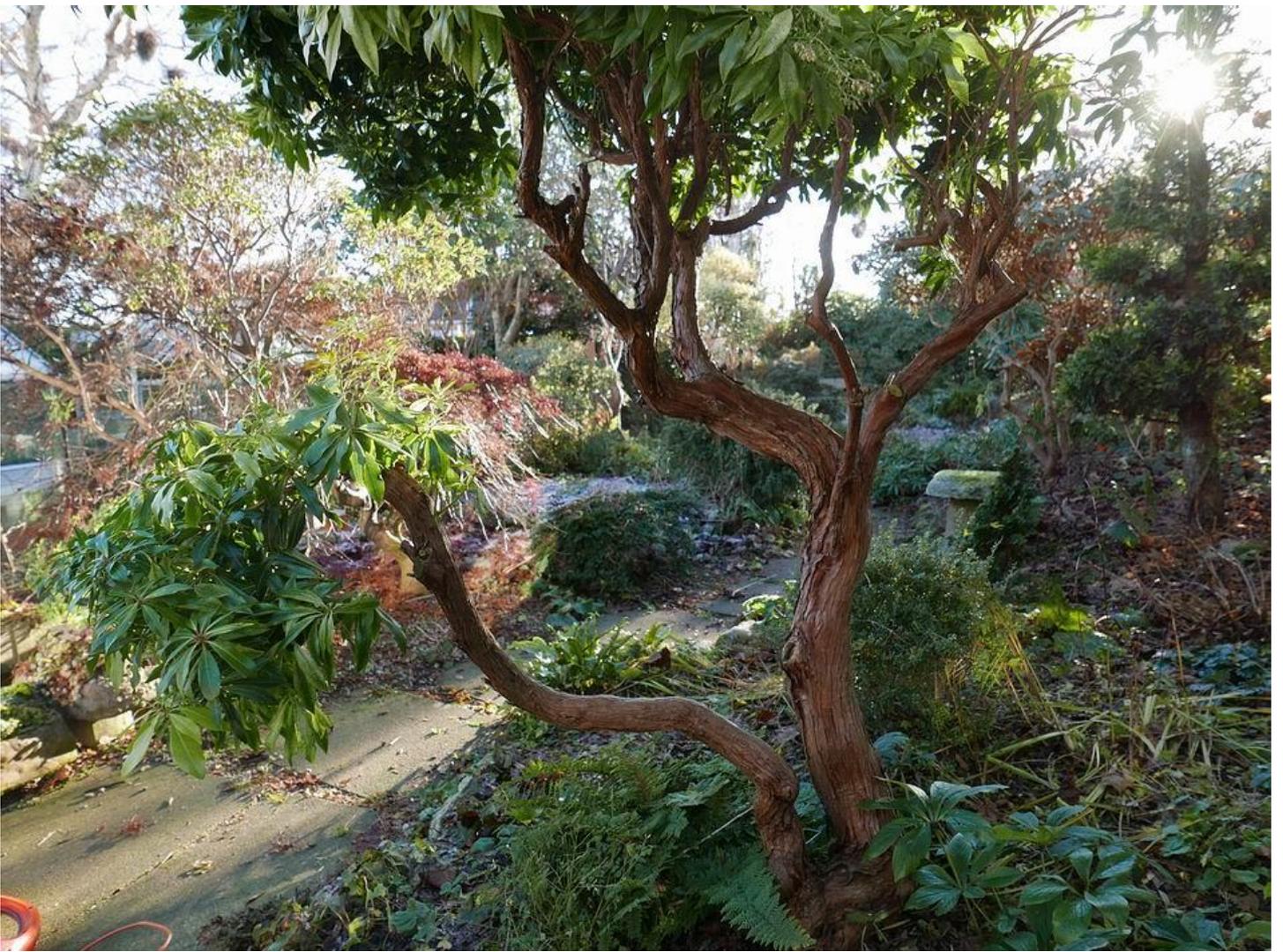
Now the leaves that were so colourful a few weeks ago are covered in ice crystals providing me with another excuse to get out with my camera and explore the patterns.





The evergreen/silver foliage of **Leucogenes leontipodium** covered in ice crystals become even more eye catching.

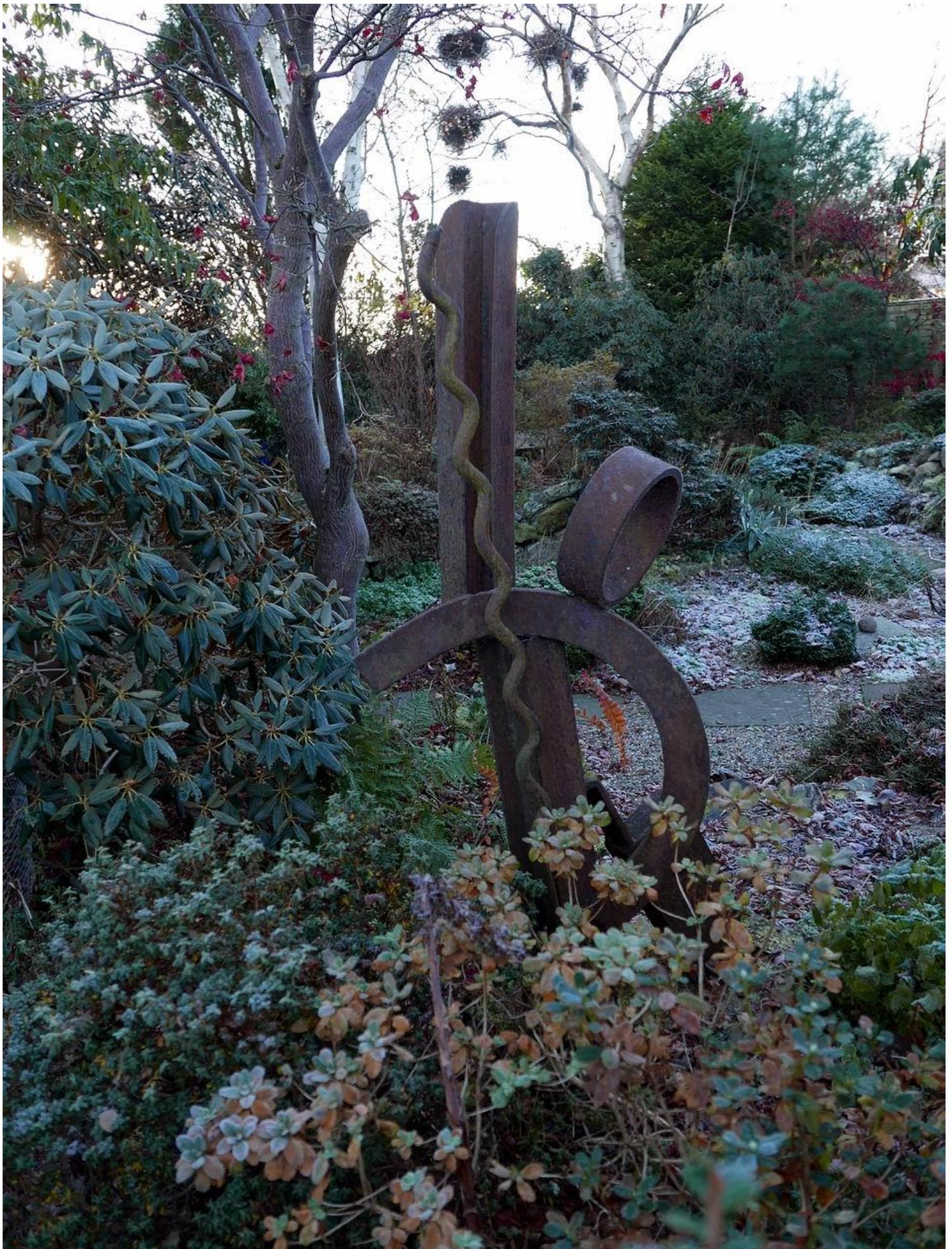




The twisted trunks of this forty year old Pieris form an interesting frame through which to view part of the garden.



Reassuringly as we enter winter there are shoots of promise to be found among the fallen leaves – this fat Trillium shoot holds the promise of flowers in the spring.



For the dedicated amongst us, gardening is neither a chore nor a product, it is a way of life that encompasses the changing seasons which along with all the successes and failures makes it so rewarding. To me it is also another medium to express my creativity so as well as having Art in the garden, the garden is Art - that is why it is called **HortiCulture**.....