



BULB LOG 31.....2nd August 2017





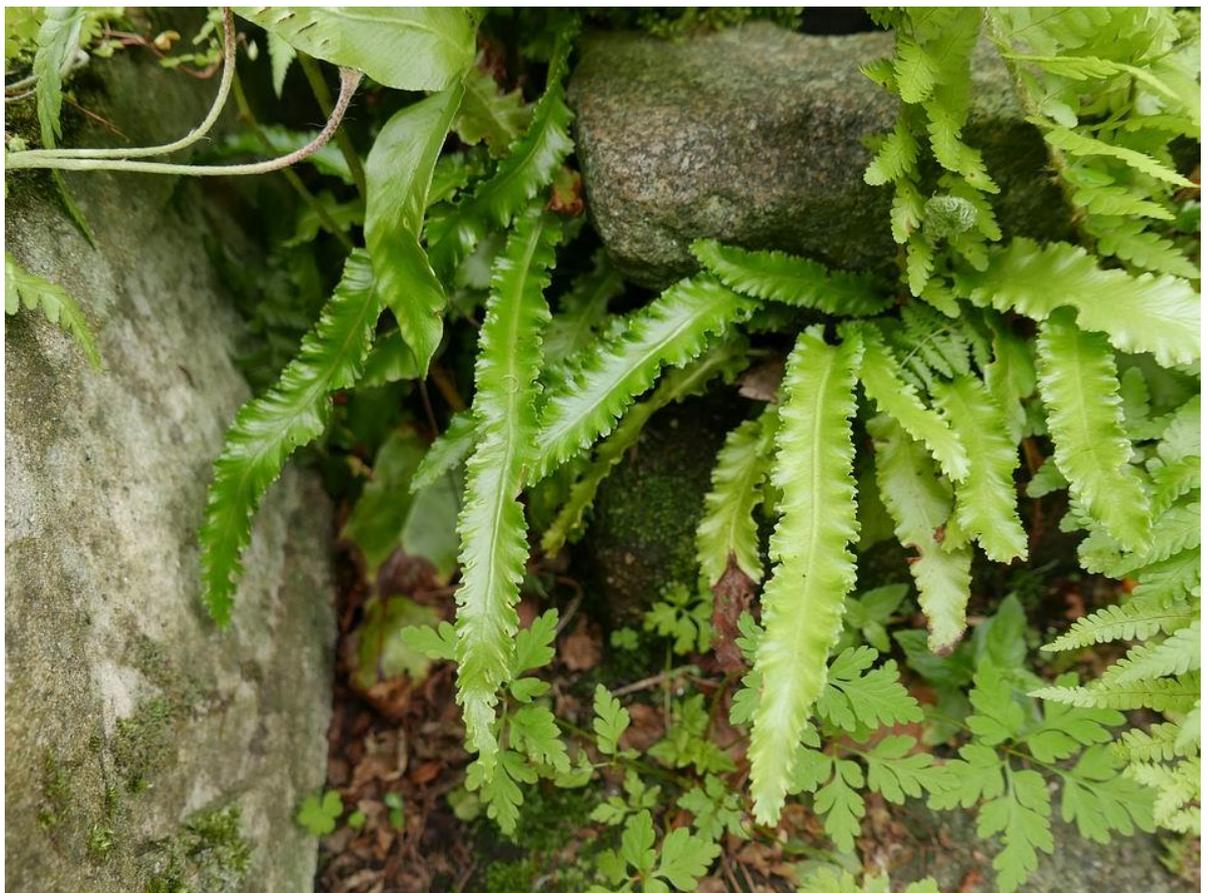
A garden without flowers need not be a garden devoid of colour or interest. There is a tendency among gardeners to think of plants primarily by the flower and in some cases they are correct to do so but flowers are short lived so we also need to consider the foliage and some plants do not have flowers. Our garden starts to bloom in February with the flower power gradually building up to a crescendo of colour in mid-April to May then our herbaceous perennials start to add their colourful flowers but by mid-July flowering is less abundant in our garden so I need to look deeper to appreciate what a fascinating mass of shape form and colour there is to be enjoyed and I need look no further than the ferns.

I raised many of the original ones from spores after being taught how to do so in a workshop given by Willie Duncan who had brought a big black plastic bag full of fronds to demonstrate the different types and species. After the workshop he gave me the bag and said now you know how - get on with it! So I followed his instructions with great success however I do not know many of their names. I planted the ferns I raised around the garden where they made themselves at home with new ones appearing all the time.



It is worth turning over the leaves to check the underside of the fern leaves for the decorative arrangement and colours of the sori containing the spores - Willie taught me to lay the spore bearing frond onto a sheet of white paper, spore side down, and after a while the spores leave their pattern on the paper these can then be sown.

The picture on the previous page shows a group of volunteer ferns growing beside our bird bath - lifting the fronds of the larger one, which I think is a form of *Dryopteris*, reveals the mass and variation of ***Asplenium scolopendrium*** from the narrow crinkly edged forms to the more typical broader more smooth edged ones shown in the next picture.





Asplenium scolopendrium



Blechnum penna marina

For a small fern *Blechnum penna marina* can cover a lot of ground as it spreads by underground stolons ; we need to beware that it does not take over.



While some ferns produce spores on the back of the fronds others produce special fronds – above the small brown upright growths are the fruiting fronds of *Blechnum penna marina* and below you can see the upright central growths which are the spore bearing fronds of *Matteuccia struthiopteris*.



Matteuccia struthiopteris, the shuttlecock fern, also spreads by stolons as well as spores so will create colonies of spaced out plants. These are easily controlled by pulling out the thick black stolons when the new small plantlet appears.



Not everything that looks like a fern is a fern – I include Polemonium and Sorbus leaves in this group of ferns to show the similar nature of the leaves.



The way we use ferns in the garden is to help bind and link everything together so the eye can relate the typical fern foliage with that of Polemonium and Sorbus or as shown in the picture on the left, a comparison of the leaf structure of *Gymnocarpium dryopteris* with *Geranium* and *Dicentra* leaves all of which we would describe as being 'fernlike'. The generic name of *Pteridophyllum racemosum* shown below refers directly to its similarity to ferns.



Pteridophyllum racemosum



Ferns can grow in such a wide range of habitats that you will always find one to suit your needs – this large evergreen fern is very happy growing in deep shade at the base of a large Rhododendron and I am making use of these properties to solve a problem across the other side of the garden.



I have been cutting back the Rhododendrons and other shrubs to recover the ground space in this bed but in doing that I open up the view into the compost area with all its clutter of bins. I was wondering what I could plant to screen the work area but leave the bed open for Erythronium and Trilliums and so I have moved some of the ferns over – in time they will grow and form a natural screen.



Saxifrages and ferns seeding into moss covered tufa.



The tufa attracts all kinds of plants some more desirable than others.



Not everything that looks like a fern is a fern; some Corydalis and Dicentra leaves are similar.



Three different ferns.



Phegopteris connectilis



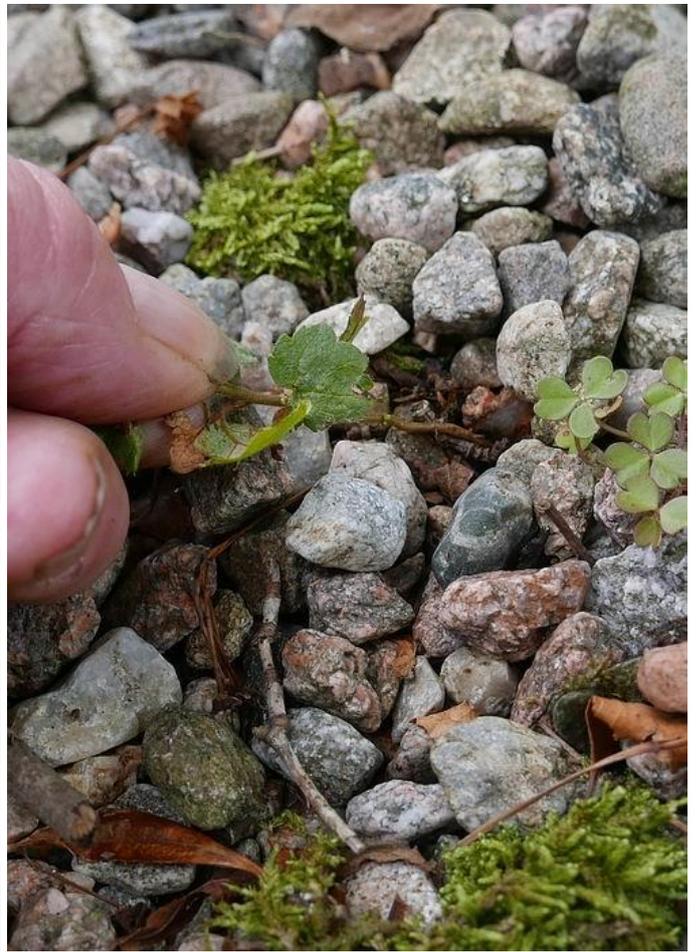
Polypodium vulgare



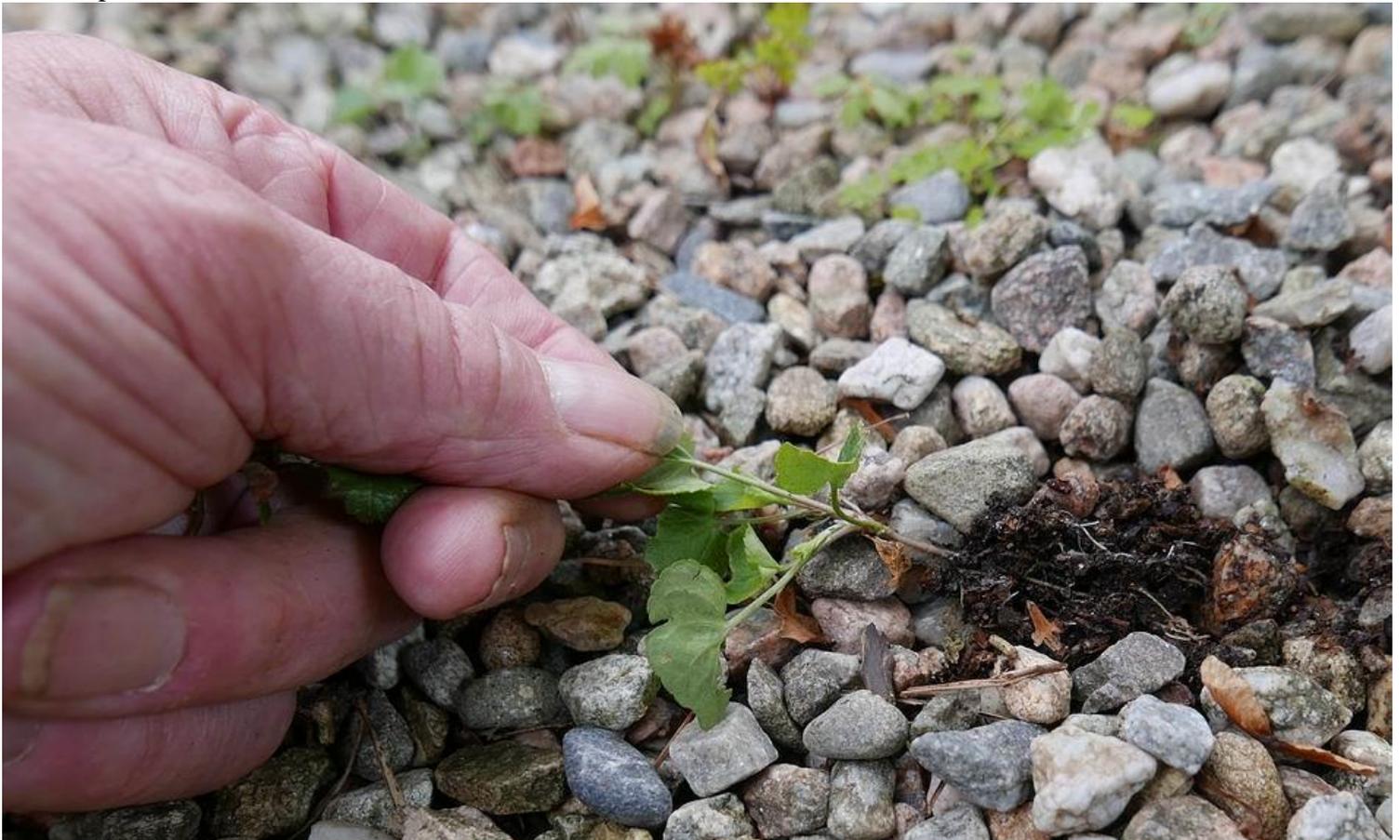
Ferns and orchids are among the most common plants that seed into the troughs.



If you allow nature some freedom attractive plantings will appear with ferns and other plants seeding into communities – it is then your decision what you will allow to stay and what has to be removed. I very much adhere to the description that a weed is simply a plant in the wrong place, it does not mean the plant is totally unwelcome.



By creating many habitats in the garden we have plenty of opportunities for plants to self-sow and it is in the gravel areas that we have the most 'weeding' to do, sometimes the plants are transplanted elsewhere but others do end up in the compost heaps. There is a right and a wrong way to pull out a weed – on the left I am pulling straight up – this is wrong the correct way is shown on the right where I am pulling the plant sideways across the ground. It makes common sense when you think about it pulling upwards you are working against the force of all the roots together but by pulling sideways you are pulling on them bit by bit and you are much more likely to get the plant out complete.





Tree seedlings are among the most common ‘weeds’ in the garden and this year there are masses of birch seedlings - if we stopped weeding the garden would turn into a dense woodland within around ten years.



While the birch seedlings have to be removed for the last few years I have been leaving this Acer seedling until it was big enough to be moved to a permanent planting space – it is now big enough so I will move it soon.



All these are plants in the wrong place but I am sure most of you would not call the Hellebore seedlings weeds, or the Meconopsis in the picture below.



All our weeding is done by hand and we have so many things seeding around the rule is you have to identify the plant before you pull it out. I find this an enjoyable task as it gets me down low looking at the smallest of plants and while there I notice other things such as the super bright coloured old leaves on this *Shortia soldanelloides*



Shortia soldanelloides



I also find some plants that have self-seeded offer me a tasty refreshment as I am down doing the weeding.



Other fruits, like these **Podophyllum peltatum**, are not visible from above but I find them hiding under the large leaves - these should not be eaten.



I quite like the *Paeony lutea* seedlings growing through the dwarf ericaceous plants.



Rodgersia sp. and *Dicentra* foliage combine in the dappled sunlight under large *Rhododendrons*.



Another Rodgersia sp. has a different leaf structure – both of these were raised from seed collected on the ACE collecting trip. Check out [Bulb Log 2016](#) to see ferns and Rodgersia leaves at an earlier stage of year when they look quite different.



The skeletal remains of a leaf from last year sits on a heavily chewed leaf and provides a wonderful photo opportunity – there are so many such images you can find when you get down close and look beyond the flowers.



Light and shade projects images onto the Meconopsis leaves while in the image below I point my camera upwards.





The contrast of light and shade along with the colours and shapes of the leaves are the subject of these two pictures.





I love my flowers when they are in season but much of the foliage is there providing decoration and interest all year round and it has other uses.



As well as providing a safe refuge for birds and acting as a wind break, the hedge also separates and gives us privacy from neighbours plus it provides an annual harvest.



I cut it hard once a year which produces a lot of cut material.





This foliage is not wasted but once passed through our shredder and composted for six months gives us a lovely mulch for the beds adding a valuable source of humus.





The garden is not completely devoid of flowers but I wanted to show how adaptable ferns and other foliage plants are in a garden – I welcome any suggestions or corrections to the names I have applied.....