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Bulb Log Diary

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Cyclamen coum





For many years we have applied a 'three strikes and you're out rule' with the plants we introduce to the garden. Generally if we try a plant and lose it three times we stop trying and move onto to other plants but sometimes the challenge of trying to find how we can adapt the conditions to satisfy a particular plant drives me to keep trying. We have looked with envy at great colonies of well-established **Cyclamen coum** producing wonderful colourful displays so early in the year in many gardens and that encouraged us to keep trying. We have raised them in the past from Cyclamen Society seed and a few miserable plants have held on and even produced the odd flower but they never look happy.

Then back around 2008 at the very time when I was making this small sand bed someone sent us a packet of Cyclamen coum seed which I just mixed in with the sand. To my surprise and delight it seems that by accident I found a suitable habitat to accommodate this plant in our garden. It seeded around gently at first until I decided to stop removing the moss that wanted to grow all over the sand and since then this Cyclamen seeds like crazy into the moss.



With this small established colony the only problem I had now was distribution. The only vectors that spread the seeds in our ant-less garden are gravity and me so the seeds tend to germinate in clusters where the capsule lays down. Sometimes I will transplant some of the seedlings carefully lifting them out of the moss then replanting them quite easily further along the bed.





There is a good range of colours in these **Cyclamen coum** from pale to dark pink with the majority being in the mid-range.







On Monday 6<sup>th</sup> March the winter returned covering the garden with a light layer of snow along with freezing temperatures down to minus 6C.



**Cyclamen coum**

These winter flowering plants have evolved to cope with such conditions only serving to make them more beautiful as their flowers in shades of pink stand out more clearly against the snow white background.





The next day we woke to find it had been snowing most of the night turning the garden into a winter wonderland. You can just make out the shape of the small rectangular sand bed shown above in the centre left foreground.



Returning to the pictures I took before the snow arrived. While each individual plant is beautiful and worthy of our attention it is the combination of them all growing together that provides the true spectacle.





The silver grey foliage of *Cyclamen hederifolium*, an autumn flowering species, with the early flowering *Eranthis*, *Galanthus*, *Leucojum* and *Helleborus* all of which are growing and seeding around across the garden.







Just as the first of the *Galanthus* flowers start to go over the *Leucojums* take over to extend the white spectacle.



***Galanthus woronowii* 'Elizabeth Harrison'**





*Leucojum vernum*



A view looking across some of the bulb beds as the garden wakens up.





The glorious yellow flowers of **Eranthis hyemalis** are all part of the seasonal displays we enjoy in the garden. The flowers need temperatures above 6C and open fully at 9C. The day I took these pictures was the only day this year that it was mild enough for the flowers to open.



Because we introduced selections such as Eranthis 'Orange Glow' and 'Schwefelglanz', whose seedling tend towards the same colour as the seed parent, we are starting to see a nice variation in the colour of the **Eranthis hyemalis** seedlings around the garden.





We planted *Eranthis x tubergenii* 'Guinea Gold' in the bed by the pond because it does not set seed. This allows us more control over its increase where we want to encourage some of the other plants to seed around.







Flowering with the **Eranthis Guinea Gold** are **Erythronium caucasicum**, **Iris reticulata**, **Narcissus cyclamineus** and various **Crocus**. If you look carefully at these pictures you should be able to see that there are many seedling leaves of varying ages scattered around the flowering plants.







Because we don't use labels in the garden I will often take pictures to record where certain plants are growing which is what I am doing here. When I wrote about *Eranthis pinnatifida* last month I mentioned that it was not doing so well in the open garden as I had hoped and at that time it had not appeared yet. Now there are leaves from three plants in this picture - can you spot them? To help I have marked them with a thin yellow circle.



The *Eranthis pinnatifida* seedlings in the pots are growing well so now that I see that the few I planted out the other year are in growth I will plant more of the two and three year old seedlings out this year.





This particular plant of **Erythronium caucasicum**, which has not increased in around 15 years, is always the first of the species to flower in the garden.



That lone flower is closely followed by this form flowering close by in a similar habitat which is slowly increasing with the growth of secondary bulbs. By carefully cross pollinating both these earliest clones I usually get a seed set on this plant but the lone flower shown in the previous picture has never set seed. We have many other forms of **Erythronium caucasicum** that come into flower up to a month later that regularly set seed.





**Iris 'Katharine Hodgkin'** has never set seed for us but increases by the many small bulbils that form in clusters around the bulbs. Only a small number of these bulbils will grow on to maturity if they are left with the parent bulb but if removed they can be grown on separately to speed up the rate of increase.



I prefer the cleaner colours of sister plant **Iris 'Sheila Ann Germaney'** which does not increase quite so freely.





**Crocus thirkianus** brings a deep egg yolk yellow to the growing number of colours, many of which are provided by crocus, that are appearing around the garden.



Unlike the woody humus rich soils we have built up across much of the garden the old rock garden bed (above) provides a rocky habitat with a free draining gravelly soil but a similar range of bulbs grows there.





I like this decorative and interesting combination of a white flowered **Crocus tommasinianus** appearing alongside the recently emerged shiny green leaves of *Colchicum davisii*, an autumn flowering species.



**Crocus tommasinianus**





**Crocus heuffelianus**



**Crocus tommasinianus and Chrysanthus cultivars.**





**Crocus tommasinianus**



Mostly but not exclusively **Crocus tommasinianus**.





Another bulb which likes our moist conditions and grows well in a number of habitats around the garden is **Narcissus cyclamineus** – the one place that we do not grow it is in a bulb house where it could get too dry.



**Narcissus  
cyclamineus**

As with most of the bulbs we leave them to seed around only intervening to help with the distribution of the seed away from the parent group.





**Narcissus cyclamineus**



A selection of the small bulbs flowering in the cobble bed, which like everything across the garden spent a week under snow and ice before it was washed away by heavy rain on Sunday night. Sadly the weight of the snow turning to ice has flattened and trashed most of the flowers and as I write on Tuesday 14<sup>th</sup> it is snowing again.





**Crocus tommasinianus**

The stop start winter/spring is something that we are used to in these parts and I know that many of you across the northern hemisphere are going through similar conditions but as gardeners we have to be optimists. Check out my latest [Bulb Log Video Diary](#) recorded a few weeks ago before the snow.

We may have lost some of the anticipated floral displays for this year but there are many more plants to come and given time nature has a way of recovering and I look forward to what else this season will deliver.....