SRGC ----- Bulb Log Diary ----- ISSN 2514-6114

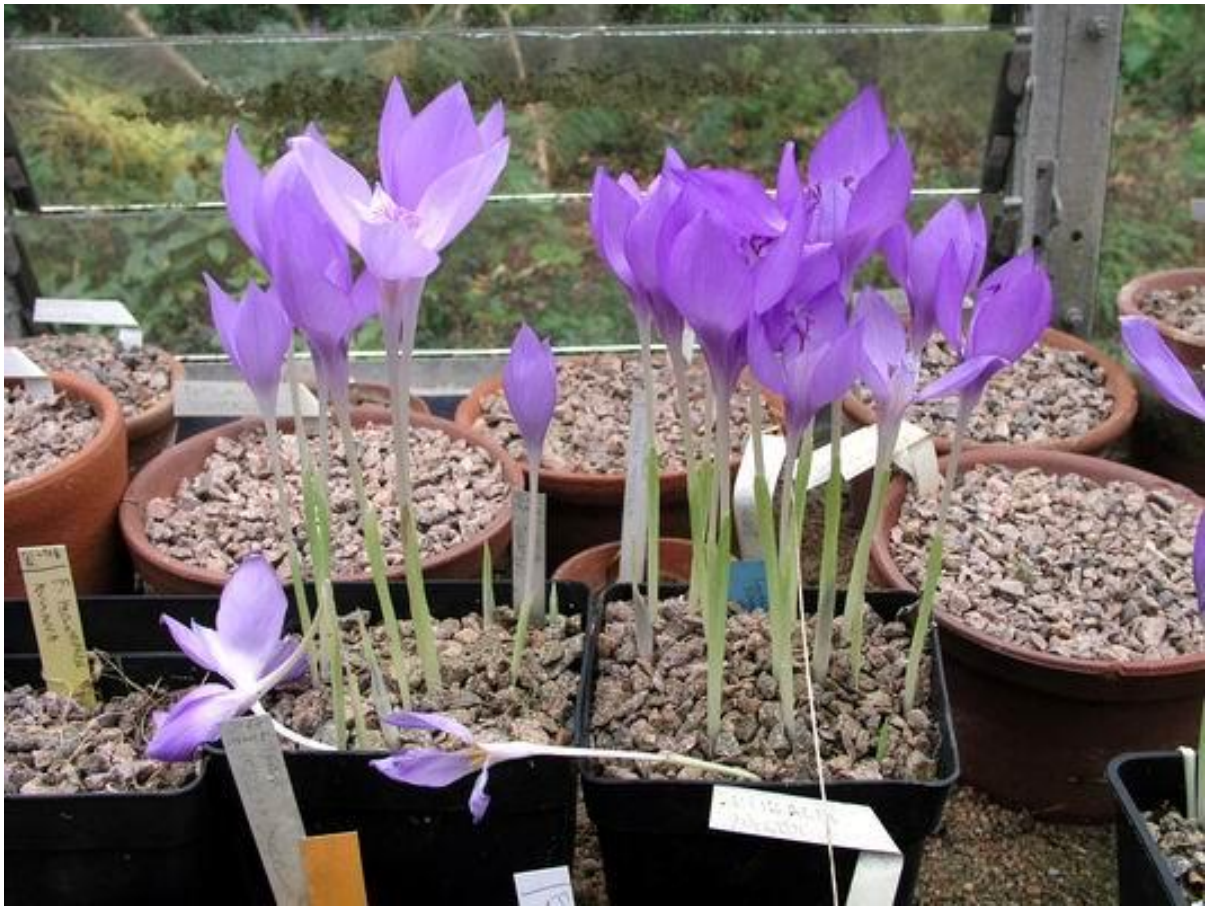
BULB LOG.....12-10-2005

Crocus in bulb house

We have just arrived back after a wonderful time at the SRGC Discussion Weekend in Pitlochry and it is amazing what has come out in the 5 days that we were away, despite the poor weather. Unfortunately, the poor light and high winds have caused some of the crocus to grow high and get blown over but I can still enjoy their beauty.

Crocus mathewii

Crocus mathewii was only just showing when we left on Thursday morning and this is it, late on Monday afternoon. This illustrates beautifully the ability of bulbs to flower very quickly. The best forms of Crocus mathewii should have that lovely dark purple throat and tube seen above. I have three pots of seedlings from this plant, the first of which I hope will flower next year, it will be interesting to see what variation there will be in the flower colour.

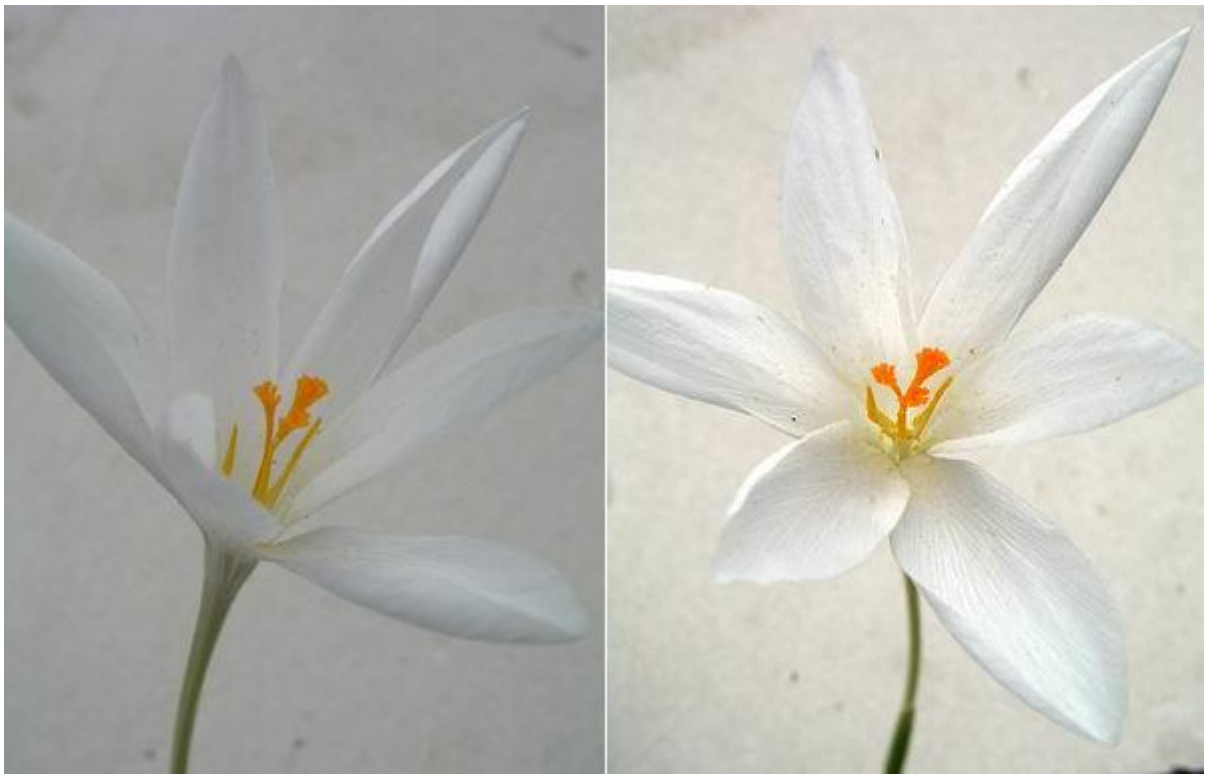


Crocus banaticus

Two more pots of Crocus banaticus raised from our own garden-collected seed. The left hand pot has second generation plants from a Romanian collection and is quite a bit darker than the right hand pot, which is the result of several generations of garden breeding by open pollination.

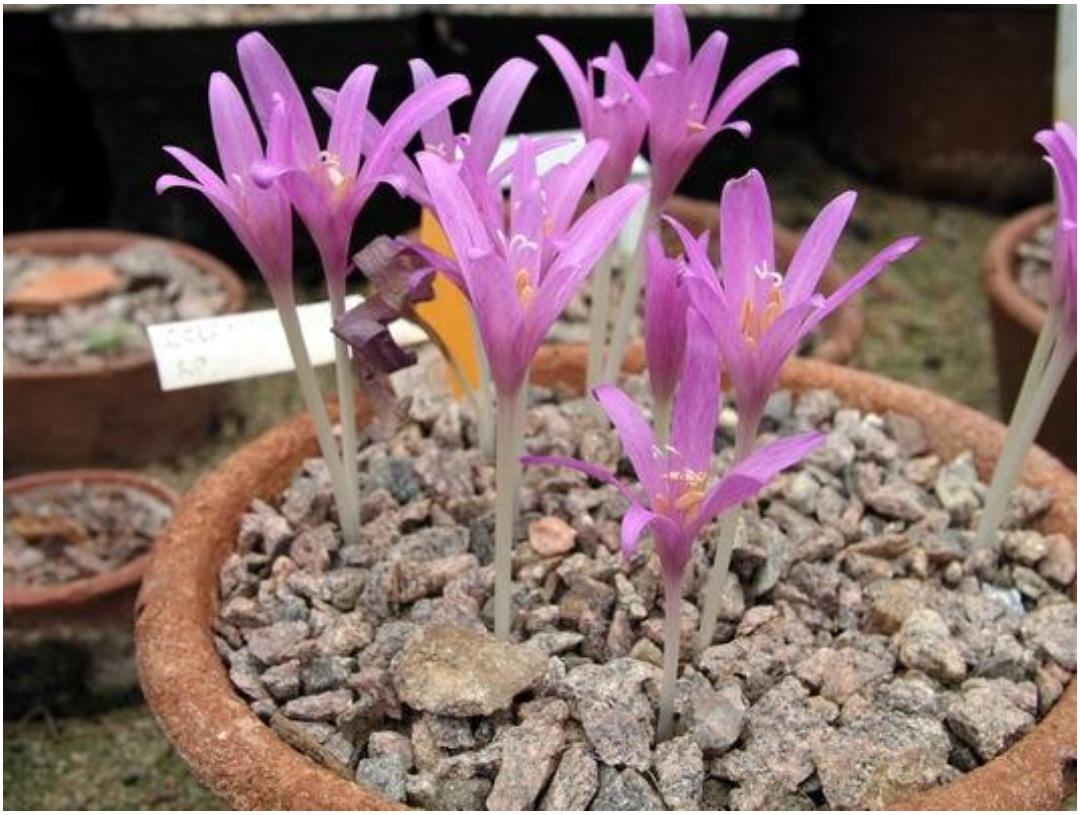
Crocus cambessedesii

Crocus cambessedesii is another of my favourites, it is much smaller than most other crocuses but in perfect proportion. This (above) is a form with good dark feathery patterns on the petals, these are retained by our seedlings which show little variation.



Crocus nudiflorus albus

In previous years I have shown you seedlings raised from Crocus nudiflorus ‘Orla’ which is a white form of nudiflorus and they were all purple like the species type: well, at long last a white seedling has come along. ‘Orla’ has a slight purple tinge when it first comes out, it fades to pure white in a day; this new seedling opens pure white and has very slightly different shaped petals. I will have to separate it out before the flower goes over while I can still distinguish it from the other seedlings in the pot.



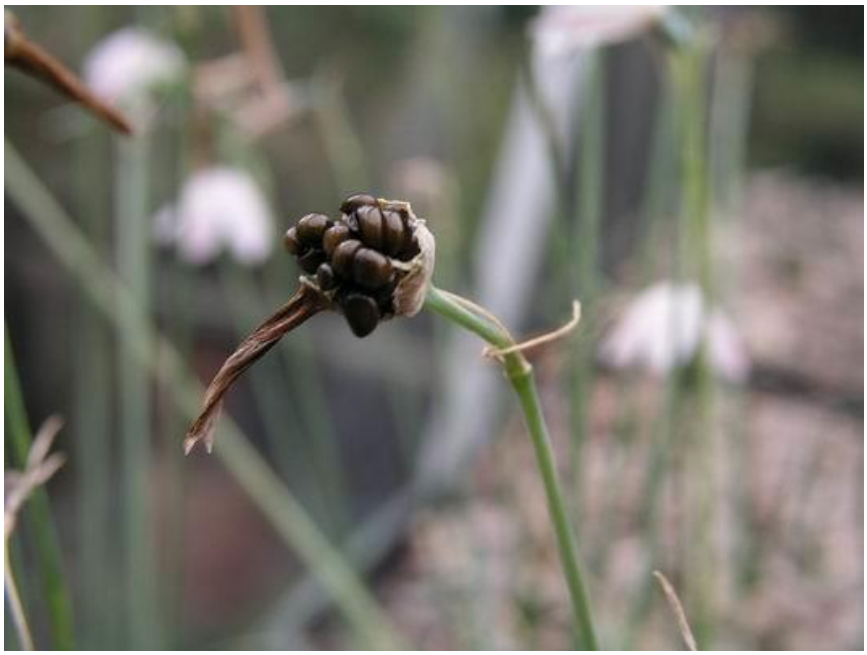
Colchicum sp. Greece

Colchicums have also appeared in the bulb house, this is one of the Greek species but I have never been able to get a confirmed name for it.

Colchicum cupanii and coustourierii

Two more colchicums in flower are the tiny flowered Colchicum cupanii (left) which flowers some time before it sends up its leaves and of a similar size on the right C. coustourierii which flowers with the leaves.

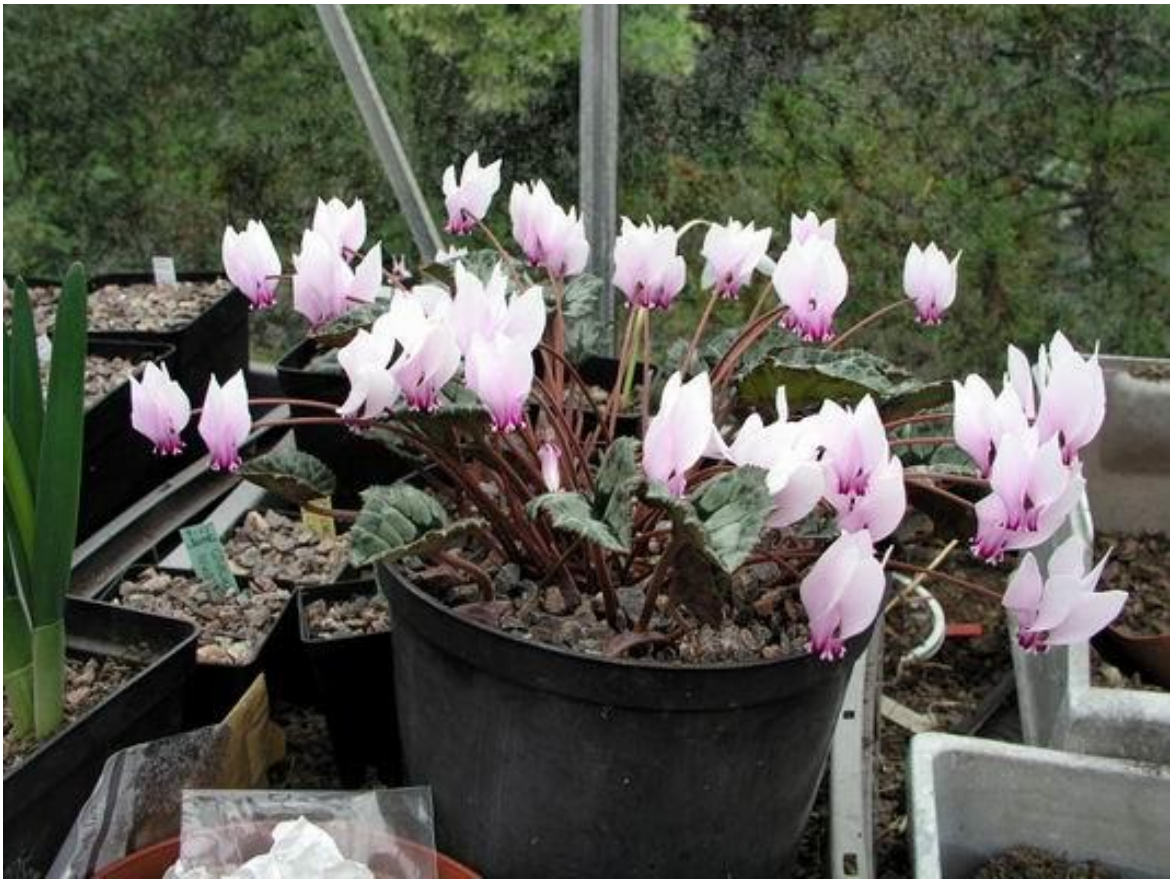
I had a question asked this week about growing multiple bulbs (an iris in this case) in a pot when, in the wild, they are always seen as single blooms growing well separated from each other. It puzzled me for a long time why bulbs in the wild rarely form clumps as we see them do in our gardens. I have a theory about this situation which I will share with you. Plants evolve through a process of natural selection and genetic accidents can make individual bulbs have slightly different characteristics, which includes bulbs that readily form offsets and some that do not. In the wild a bulb that forms a clump quickly is in the situation of having many bulbs very close together all competing for the same water and nutrients so it is at an evolutionary disadvantage to bulbs that remain single and without this competition. However, in the garden, nutrient levels are higher and clump forming bulbs have a big advantage namely the gardener who will favour them over bulbs that remain single by lifting and splitting them on a regular basis. So my theory is that clump forming bulbs in the wild will quickly diminish, starved by the added competition and so that is why we rarely see them. To get back to the original question should we be growing our bulbs individually in pots the answer is no.



Leucojum roseum in seed

Another interesting observation is that of all the autumn flowering bulbs that we grow it is only Leucojum roseum and autumnale that set seed immediately, all the others form their seed slowly and it does not ripen until the late spring or even later. Why is this, I ask myself ? Last year I experimented by sowing our Leucojum roseum seed as soon as it was ripe to see if I could get any germination before the winter but, as I reported, it did not start to germinate until the spring, so that is not the reason. I think the answer is more obvious: if we look at the flower

stem and seed capsule, there is no way that would physically survive a winter of being battered by the weather, so it sheds its seed into the ground where they wait until spring.

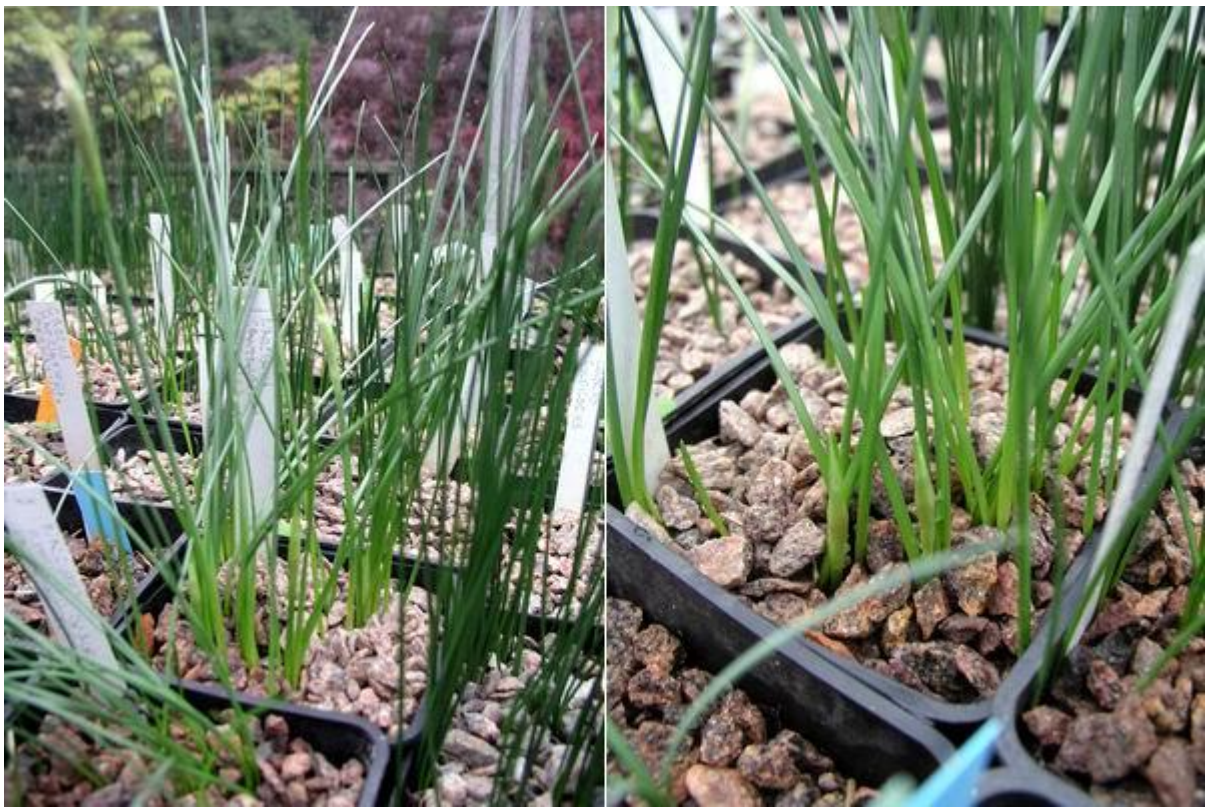


Cyclamen africanum

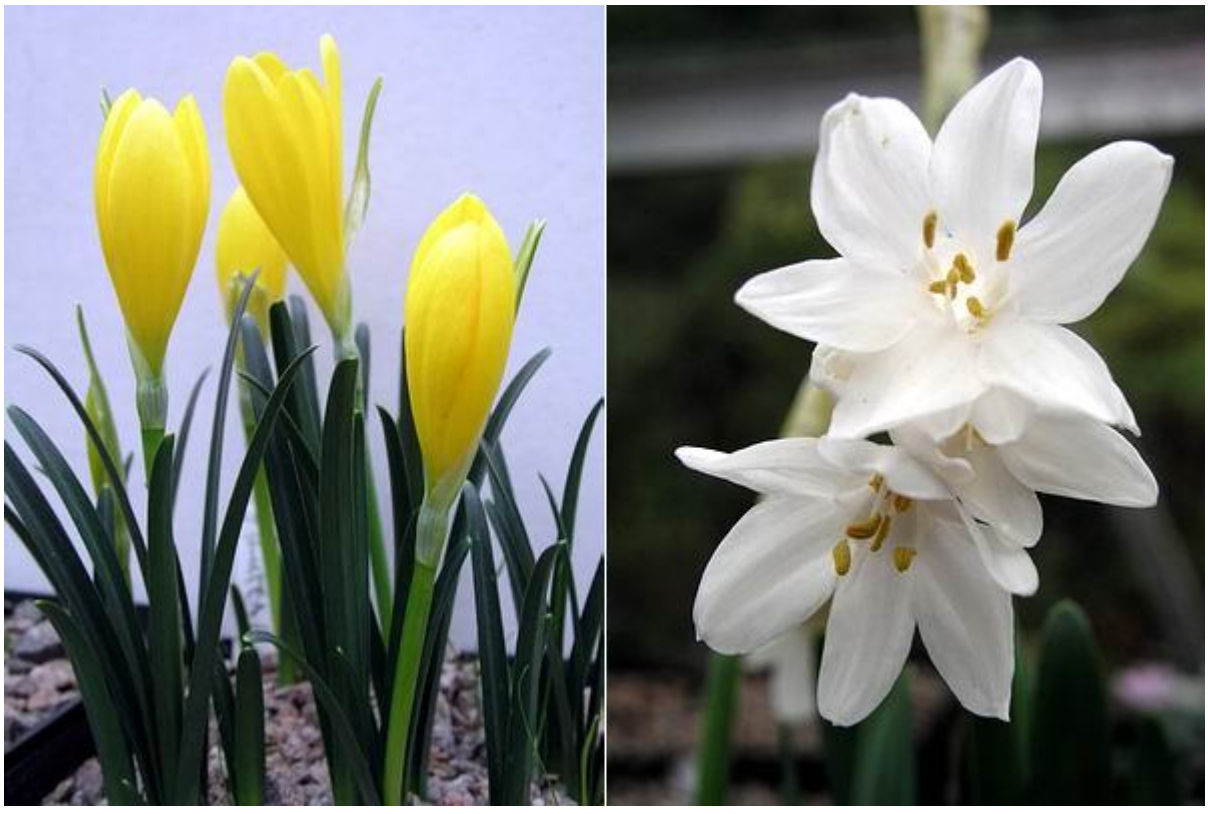
Plants like cyclamen form and ripen their seed very slowly, some taking nearly 12 months to go through this process and so they have evolved a tough seed pod that is pulled down close to the corm by the recoiling flower stem which will help protect the seedpod. Crocus have evolved a different strategy, they have their ovary underground, only the flower tube pushes above the ground at flowering time the flower stem does not elongate until the end of the growth cycle in spring/summer, pushing the seed pods above the ground.

Narcissus leaves

With all this leaf growth on the Narcissus I have applied the second storm, giving them a complete soaking just like I did at the start of September. Because I am shifting over to plastic pots, I have been observing the moisture levels very closely and the fritillaries that I have in plastic pots are still moist enough not to require the second storm yet. The frits in clay pots have become pretty dry and did require the second storm to keep enough moisture for the growing roots. I had a couple of test plastic pots that had identical compost and top dressing to the others, but no bulbs in, so I can easily tip these out to see how much moisture is present and gauge when I need to water again.



Narcissus leaves and buds
Some narcissus even have buds appearing.



Sternbergia lutea and Narcissus broussonetii

Two other flowers to end on this week are Sternbergia lutea and Narcissus broussonetii which is an autumn flowering narcissus with a fabulous scent.