

BULB LOG 19.....7th May 2008**Erythronium 'Susannah' in rain**

Our weather is a double edged sword – on the one hand it is the cool wet conditions that allows us to grow so many of the plants we love but those same conditions often prevent us enjoying the flowers for any length of time. Cold rain and hail have hit us during the peak flowering period of the Erythroniums and this will cause brown spots to appear on the flowers.

**Erythronium tuolumnense**

I did get lots of pictures taken before the cold wet front came and this is a nice form of Erythronium ; the flowers held well above the neat leaves which are much smaller than many of the forms commonly seen in the UK.



Erythronium 'Joanna'

The best hybrid between *Erythronium tuolumnense* and *revolutum* is *Erythronium 'Joanna'* which seems to get away with mixing yellow and pink by producing up to five nice flowers per stem.



Erythronium 'Craigton Cover Girl' in garden

Out in the garden a clump of *Erythronium 'Craigton Cover Girl'* looked beautiful before the rain hit it. *Erythronium 'Craigton Cover Girl'* and '*Ruapuna Dawn*'
Erythronium 'Craigton Cover Girl' is a *revolutum* hybrid and here I compare it to another similar but distinctly different cross - '*Ruapuna Dawn*'. '*Craigton Cover Girl*' is much darker than '*Ruapuna Dawn*' but both produce multiple flowers per stem and increase to form good clumps relatively quickly.



Erythronium hendersonii

I have a number of seed raised groups of *Erythronium hendersonii*; some are among the first to flower in the year and are long past while others have just reached the peak flowering period now – a sustained flowering period is one of the big advantages of raising from seed.



Erythronium hendersonii pollen colour

Another advantage of raising from seed is the variation you will get in even a small population. Here you can see two colours of pollen – golden on the left and brown on the right.



Erythronium hendersonii flower

All that lovely ripe pollen is just waiting to be transferred onto the stigma and as the cold conditions is keeping the pollinator count low I do the job my self. When the plants are all in a group like this it is easy just to manipulate two flowers from different plants face to face and wipe pollen onto the stigma – this will improve the chances of getting a seed set. The temperatures also play a big part in fertilisation and if it is too cold the pollen will not grow down the tube to the ovary and no seed will be set.



Dead flowers on leaves

I have repeatedly told you that I am careful to remove the dead flowers in the bulb house to help prevent botrytis – here is a superb example of what can happen. This is out side and the spent petals from a flower has fallen onto a leaf, then it has attracted botrytis which has passed into the living tissue of the leaf causing considerable damage – be warned.



Fritillaria persica and imperialis

Fritillaria persica and imperialis are looking good and holding up well to the poor weather – it has turned warm and bright these last few days which helps a lot. Generally plants with nodding flowers, like these, have evolved in climates where rain is likely when they are in flower. I got this form of Fritillaria imperialis as ‘Maxima’ but I remember that ‘Maxima’ had darker flowers than this but it is still a good form with large well marked flowers.



Arum creticum

An interesting plant to be growing outside in our condition is Arum creticum. We used to grow it in a pot for taking to shows but lack of space and the terrible smell it makes in a confined space caused me to reduce my stock and plant a few in the garden to see if they would survive. This one below a south facing wall has flowered for three years now.



Bulb house 06.05

I am conscious of the fact that I have not mentioned what I am doing in the bulb house just now so here is my update. About a week or ten days ago I gave everything a good soaking adding some potassium to certain pots that I thought would benefit from an extra dose of nutrient. Now there are the first signs of yellowing in some of the leaves indicating that the plants are going into retreat.



Narcissus Leaves

These plants which are starting to yellow will not need watered again this year – there is sufficient moisture around in the compost and the sand plunge for their reducing needs. The leaves will slowly die back as the bulb enters its summer dormancy, swelling in size as it does. I can already feel the swelling by running my fingers down the sides of the pots and feeling the distortion – a happy sign indicating that I have got my regime much better this year than I did last when I was guilty of not watering enough. Last year with my move to all plastic pots I was worried about over watering which resulted in smaller bulbs than I would like and a considerable shortage of flowers this past spring.



Leaves in bulb house

The same rule applies to crocus, fritillaria and any bulbs whose leaves are starting to go yellow. It is wrong to water them in an attempt to force them to grow a bit longer – this will not work and is more likely to result in your bulbs being too wet as they go dormant and so they may rot. I am also much happier to see the bulbs going back naturally this year unlike last year when a sudden and unseasonable very hot spell caused many bulbs to shut down prematurely before they could complete their proper growth cycle. There is still time to water or give a last feed to any bulbs that still have green turgid leaves, and I have quite a number of those, I will just take care not to water into any pots that have yellowing leaves.



Tropaeolum tricolorum and azureum

An interesting and attractive colour combination is created where Tropaeolum tricolorum and azureum have intertwined.