



Dactylorhiza orchids with Corydalis 'Craigton Blue'



If you were to visit us today you would be greeted by the colourful display above of Dactylorhiza orchids growing happily through Corydalis 'Craigton Blue'. This is one of the many combinations that we use in our 'high rise' or 'time share' gardening. Early in the year this same bed had a colourful mix of Corydalis solida types various Crocus and Narcissus – these are now dormant and not in any way in competition with the plants above: this is what I call 'time share' gardening. By planting various combinations of plants at different depths in the same bed (hence my other description 'high rise' gardening) we can have an ever changing seasonal display giving some beautiful effects of contrast in shape, form and colour.

As seen on the left we use exactly this method all over the garden with the orchids providing one of the feature flowers in the summer in beds that also contain all the spring flowering bulbs such as Crocus, Corydalis and Erythronium.



Dactylorhiza orchids

This is another healthy clump of orchids that is probably at its peak of display and by that I mean that if I do not divide it this year it will start to get too congested with too many flowers competing for the same limited resources of water and nutrition. In the wild you rarely see orchids, or any bulbous plant, forming such clumps as we see in cultivation. Part of the reason could be that clump forming clones would dwindle after a few years because of this intense competition and so they are disadvantaged while the single spikes thrive. However in the garden the opposite is the case provided we that gardeners intervene and divide the clumps every three to five years. I will split the clump when the flowers have faded and will show you the process in a future bulb log – if you can't wait check back in previous years' logs.



Dactylorhiza orchid Self seeded in pot

If you are wondering where we got all the orchids in our garden the picture on the left gives the answer. Having originally, at great expense bought a few around thirty odd years ago, we gradually built up a good number by division only to lose most of them a number of years ago to the various fungal diseases that spread around the country. However over those years we kept finding self sown seedlings in odd places around the garden.



Dactylorhiza orchid Self seeded in pot

For many years I tried collecting the Dactylorhiza seed and sowing them in pots -with absolutely no success.

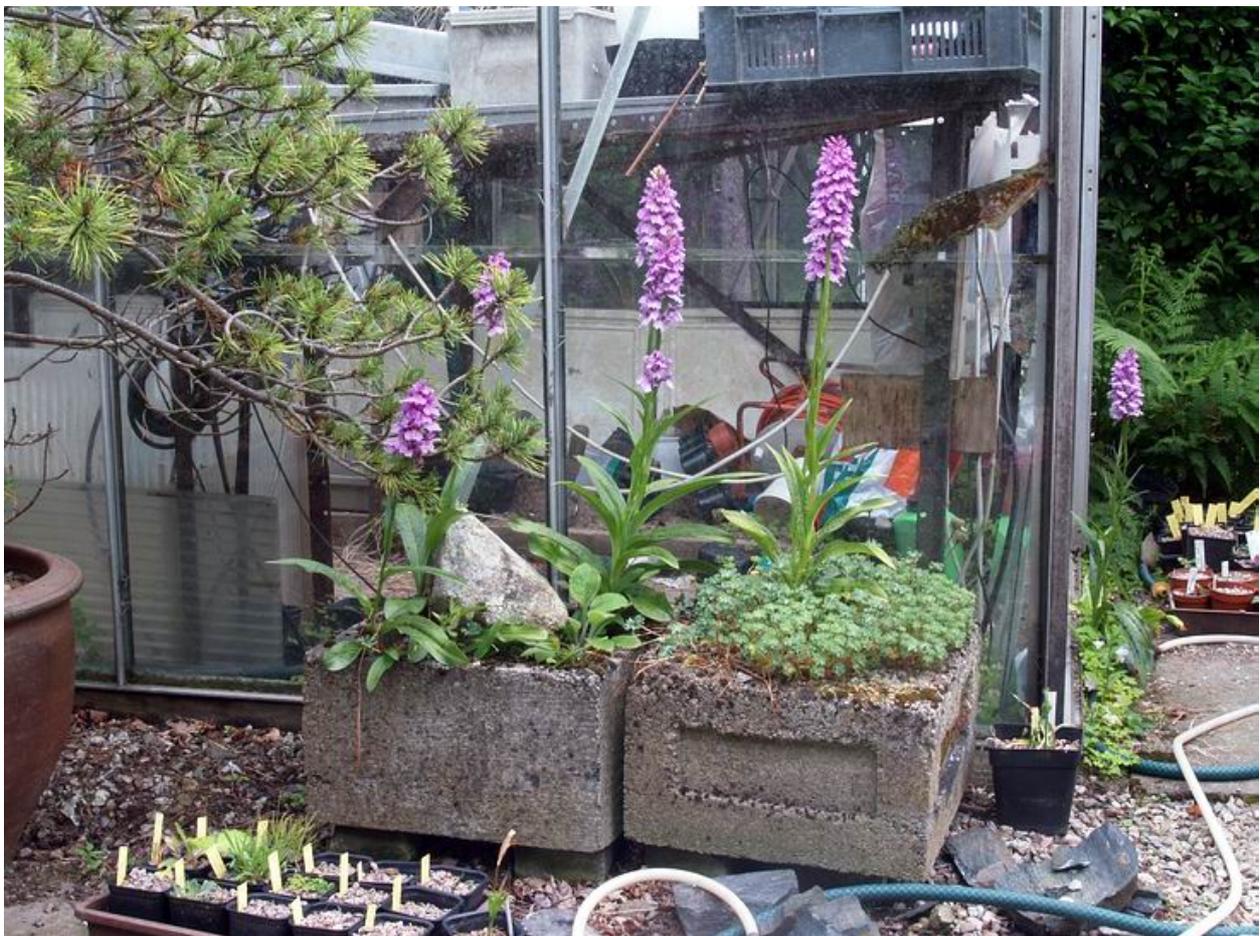
I read that to be successful you need to sow orchid seeds into an agar or similar medium in almost laboratory conditions. This seemed ridiculous to me since surely they do not get laboratory conditions in the wild.

Then I noticed that I was getting odd seedlings appearing in old seed pots of other seeds that had not been disturbed for a number of years – neglected would be a good description.

This could not be further removed from the laboratory conditions that I had read about.

I then concluded that the seed could germinate in places that were low in nutrients and not disturbed just like the neglected seed pots.

They often occurred in pots of bulbous seeds like lilies that I had not touched since they were sown around three years earlier.



Dactylorhiza orchid self seeded in troughs

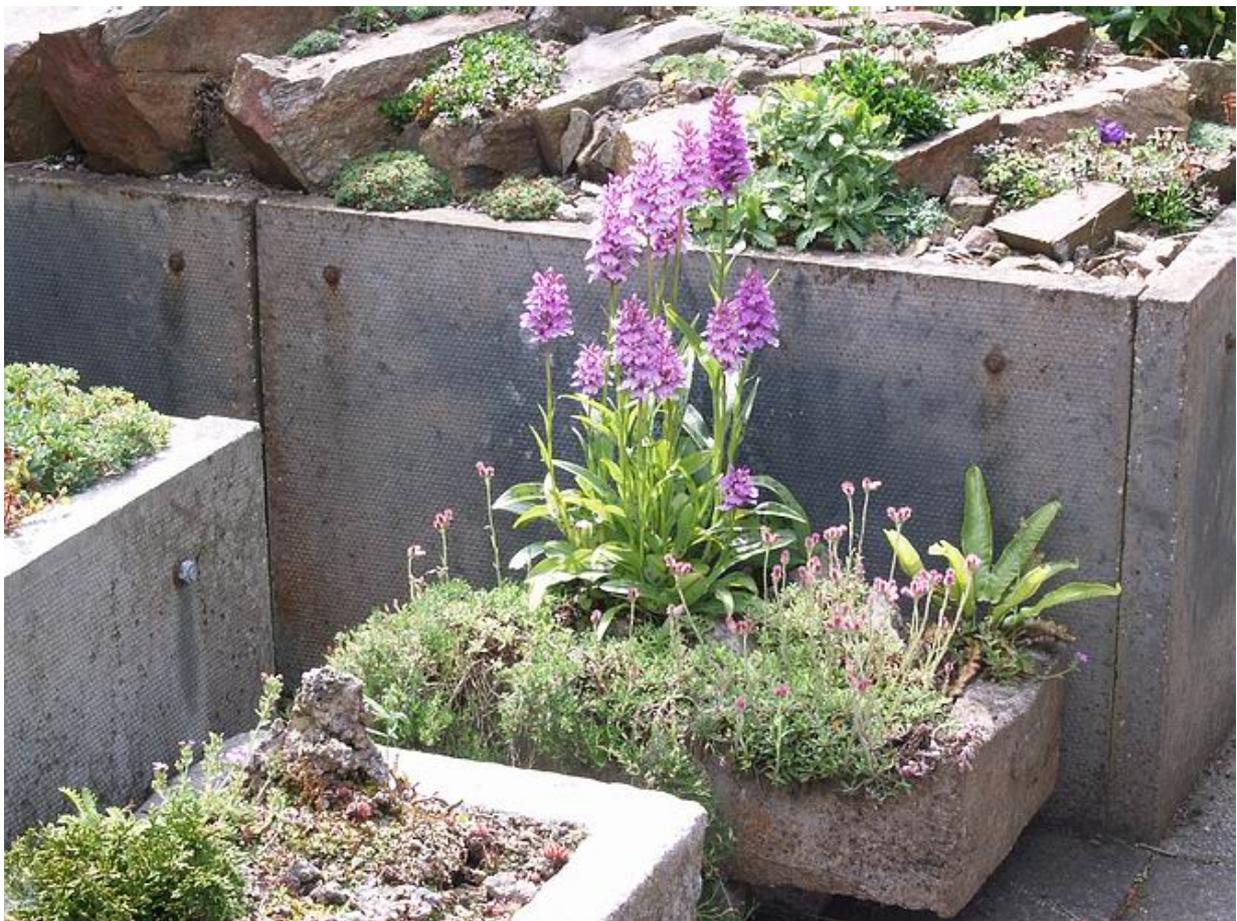
Another place that met that undisturbed requirement was the many troughs we have around the garden such as the ones above that were originally planted up with various Oxalis species raised from South American seeds – and notice to the right by the side of the glasshouse is another one.



Self seeded orchid

Growing between the slab and the edge of the glasshouse, again in undisturbed ground, another orchid appears along with ferns and some of the weedy oxalis among others. I should tell you that one day I am going to have to lift this slab to dig out a host of plants that are growing in this narrow bit of ground. When I sow seeds I often do it in this glass house to protect me from bad weather and I place the seed pots on this slab before moving them to a seed frame. I cannot tell you how often I then come out and carelessly kick them over - will I never learn? The answer is

probably no!! However as a result there are all sorts of Trilliums and Erythronium seedlings to name but a few growing in this gap.



Orchid self seeded in trough

Having discovered that this is where the orchid seeds are most likely to germinate I started to cut off the ripe seed heads and scatter the dust-like seeds over troughs. This trough has been planted for way over ten years without any disturbance and the orchid has gradually clumped up to form the best feature of the planting.



Orchid tubers

I noticed about two years ago that some of the orchid tubers were almost on the surface and I meant to do something about that but never got around to it.

Here is a picture showing that they will survive and grow away even though they are more than half way out of the soil. You can see clearly last year's tuber above at left and next year's one complete with white shoot already well formed to the right below it.

I will not leave them like this and fully intend to replant them later this year



Trough portrait

One of the things I did this week was to photograph all our smaller (movable) troughs portrait style against a grey background to update my Trough powerpoint presentation.

I will replant this trough complete with the orchids as despite its neglected look I like it. I will try and retain this mature planting look when I do but I must get the orchids planted down at a better level where they can be happier.

Much is written about the symbiotic relationship with mycorrhizal fungi that orchids need to succeed. I am sure that these fungi are naturally occurring and must also enjoy these undisturbed growing conditions.

Whenever I lift *Dactylorhiza* to split them the first thing I notice is the musty smell of wet horse that I believe to be the fungi.

This smell was absent on any of the diseased ones that we had a number of years ago.



Dactylorhiza - Garden view

All around the garden we have Dactylorhiza forms in flower just now and almost all are from self sown seedlings and that have subsequently been spit up and replanted when they form a clump. Each individual will in turn form a clump and need to be split if it is to thrive in the long term.



Dactylorhiza orchid forms

They are happy growing in most of the conditions our garden offers and associate well with most plants.

Here they are in one of our drier well drained raised beds growing well along side white flowered *Celmisias* from New Zealand.



Dactylorhiza 'Eskimo Nell'

Amazingly they will grow in beds that are in quite deep shade that only get some sun late in the day. I always think that white lifts a planting of mixed colours to a higher level and so I am working at increasing our stock of the white flowered Dactylorhiza 'Eskimo Nell' by dividing it every second year.



Dactylorhiza 'Eskimo Nell'

I lifted and split this group last year spacing each plant to give it enough room to grow with out the close competition but keeping the effect of a clump – the pink one was also split at the same time.



Dactylorhiza 'Eskimo Nell'

It is also worth get in close and looking at each individual flower and not just viewing the spike as a whole from distance.



The spikes come in all shapes and sizes.



Garden view

I would not want to be without the Dactylorhiza seedlings all around the garden and I am delighted that given some little effort every few years when I split them up they seem to grow so well for us and what a great contribution they make to the summer beds.



Wild Orchids at sea side, Aberdeen

It should be no surprise that they grow so well for us as less than three miles away at the sea side is the most beautiful display of natives – the source of my inspiration but not my plants.



Garden view

Here is my garden version of nature's wonder: above a wild look and below a bit more formal.



Garden view