



BULB LOG 43.....28th October 2009



Autumn colours

For those of you who are unfamiliar with the very popular SRGC online forum, we have a topic for 'Weather' and one called 'Moan, Moan, Moan' and that is what we are doing about the weather we have been having lately. The picture above appears to be a nice bright autumn scene but this picture does not show how low the light levels are. We have had nothing but heavy cloud and rain for over a week now.



Arisaema ciliatum seed

In previous years I have left these bright red seed heads of *Arisaema ciliatum* on the ground where they fell. I have been surprised that no birds or any other wild life seems to touch them and was delighted to get a reply on the forum complete with a picture of a partially eaten *Arisaema* seed head in the wild – the bird flew off just before the picture could be taken. I am now wondering why our birds do not like them and if that will change over time. There are already too many *Arisaema* in this bed so I lifted these seed heads this year.



Eucomis

A few years ago we planted a few additional Eucomis in the garden as we both like them and many flower late in the year extending the flowering season into November.

I cannot remember what this one is called – it has large dark purple leaves with a strange waxy texture and this year it has sent up a flower spike which is now about 60cms tall which has nice pink/purple flowers.



Dactylorhiza stems

As winter approaches many plants, like these Dactylorhiza, are retreating underground.

After a while, especially in windy wet weather, the stems fall over covering adjacent plants such as these dwarf ericaceous plants and Celmisias in the above picture. As well as the damage the soggy wet stems can do to the shrubs I like to remove them for another reason and that is to protect the new growths from being eaten by slugs.



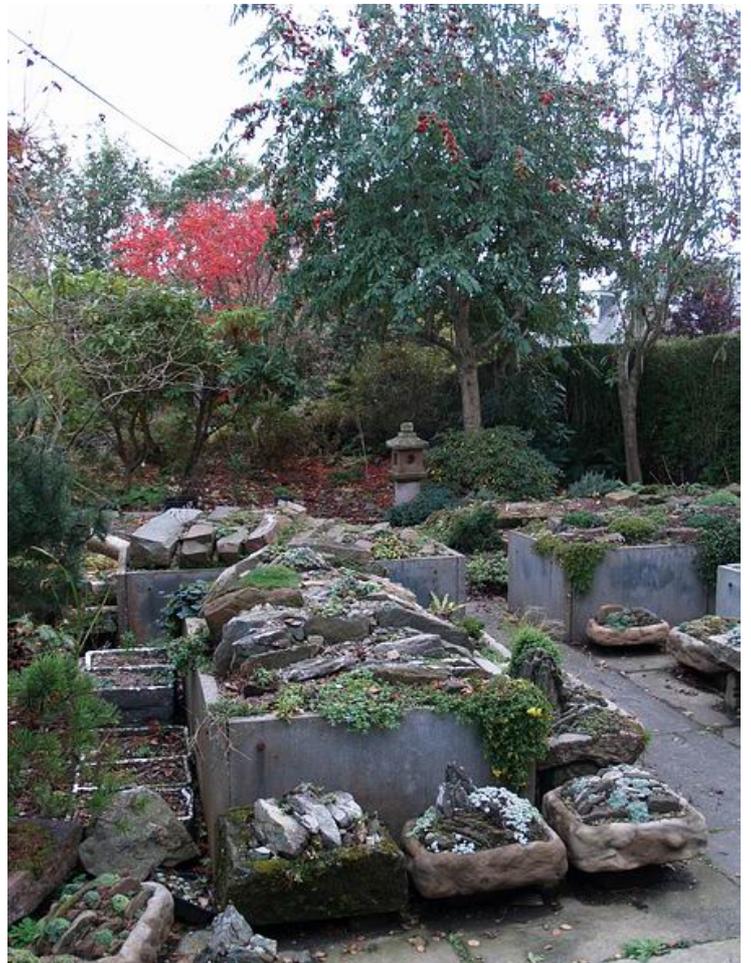
Dactylorhiza shoots

The hole in the ground around the base of the old stems provides a ready made tunnel to guide slugs and snails down to the choice shoots as they lie dormant just below the surface. I remove the stems by giving them a sharp tug while holding my other hand on the surface to prevent me pulling up the plant – if they do not come away easily with a tug I then cut them just below the surface. Once you have removed the stems it is important to firm the ground to close off these holes and so deny the slugs an easy meal. I scraped back the surface to reveal the shoots only a few centimetres below the soil so I also intend to add a good layer of mulch. The two “out of focus spots” in this picture are the results of rain drops on the camera lens – both of these pictures along with a number of the others in this week’s log had to be taken in rain using flash.



Roscoea humeana leaves

I use the same methods with many other plants such as *Roscoea humeana* which also have tender shoots and fat storage roots that would provide an easy meal for slugs during the winter if you do not close off the gaps in the soil left by the stems as they die off.



Here are another couple of **autumn scenes** in the garden showing the woodland section and the trough area.



Cyclamen hederifolium silver form leaves

Most of the *Cyclamen hederifolium* flowers are now past but the leaves will remain an attractive feature in the garden all through the winter and it will be next summer before they eventually die back. Sometimes in our cool conditions they would remain green all year round and I have to remove them in the summer before next years flower start appearing



Cyclamen hederifolium leaves

While the picture of the silver leaves above shows a number of seedlings planted out together this clump represents a single plant and I have included my hand to give you an idea of scale and the spread it has.



Arum creticum and Cyclamen africanum

It is often said that the way to tell the difference between *Cyclamen hederifolium* and *C. africanum* is to plant them out and if it survives it is *C. hederifolium* and if it dies then it is *C. africanum*; which the books say should not be hardy in our climate. Well this is, I believe, *C. africanum* which has been planted out at the base of our south facing kitchen wall for over five years now. Alongside it is *Arum creticum*, another plant not thought to be hardy for us, which I planted out at the same time and it too has slowly increased while other planted in different sites around the garden have not survived. Many bulbs will survive our winters but then rot off in our cool wet summers but when they are planted in a well drained site that will dry out in summer they can survive.



Crocus laevigatus

This is one of a number of rogue plants that I have in my pots of bulbs. It has arrived as a stray seed that I either dropped accidentally into the adjacent pot or was scattered before I collected the seeds.

This one is in a pot of *Calochortus* and so will not be difficult to rogue out when I repot.

I kind of like the idea of having an autumn flowering bulb sharing a pot with this late spring flowering *Calochortus* and they both seem happy so I might just leave it as a mixed pot.



Crocus laevigatus

It is not the only *Crocus laevigatus* that has appeared this way and this is one that I have rogued previously from another pot and planted out in the small sand bed that I constructed about three years ago where I place all my stray unidentified bulbs at repotting time.



Shoot and tuber

While taking that picture of the *Crocus* above I noticed this *Corydalis* tuber growing right on the surface of the sand plunge. As well as planting the strays in this bed I also plant out small offsets and scatter seeds so all sorts of interesting plants are appearing. You can also see a nice fat shoot of another *Crocus* on the left plus one of the problem plants of many of our sand plunges, raised beds and troughs – liverwort.



Narcissus cantabricus foliosus

Narcissus cantabricus foliosus is always the first of the winter flowering species to open its flowers in the bulb house. This is the start of the long succession of *Narcissus* flowers we should be able to enjoy all through the winter. Unfortunately the flower stems will etiolate in the very poor light levels we have through the winter and this is not going to be helped by the dark days we are currently experiencing.



Sternbergia sicula



Sternbergia greuteriana

I make no excuses for returning to the topic of the relationship between *Sternbergia lutea*, *Sternbergia sicula* and *Sternbergia greuteriana* which has puzzled me for a long time. There has also been much discussion on the *Sternbergia* threads on the forum along with some wonderful pictures of them growing in the wild. As well as the shape of the tips of the tepals, pointed in *S. sicula*, left, and rounded in *S. greuteriana* on the right the way the flowers reflex when fully open also differs. *S. sicula*, left, holds its tepals like an open goblet never folding back on themselves while *S. greuteriana*, right, recurve.

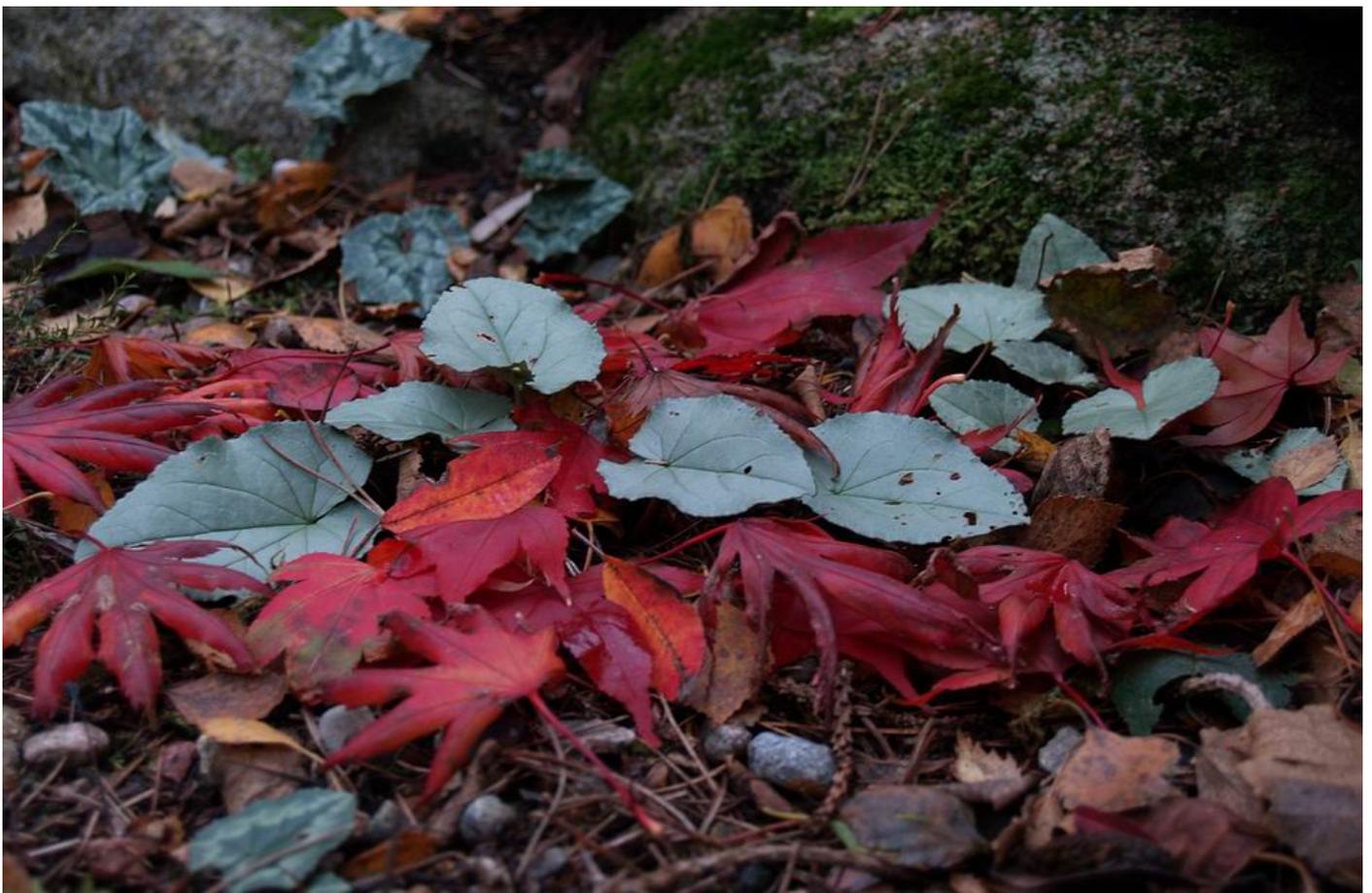


Sternbergia sicula



Sternbergia greuteriana

Another characteristic that could help separate them out is how the flowers stem behaves as the seed is setting. Both the plants I have as Sternbergia sicula and S greuteriana behave in a similar way and the stem bends over to place the ripening seed pod on or even pushed into the gravel. I have no S. lutea flowering this year and I cannot remember noting if they too behave like this - perhaps someone can tell me. I am also reminded to add some sulphate of potash powder to the tops of the Sternbergia pots now that they have finished flowering; a practice that I started a few years ago as part of my attempt to get these wee beauties to flower better for me.



Fallen autumn leaves and Cyclamen

If you enjoy reading the bulb log and would like to see many more excellent pictures covering all sorts of plants in gardens and native habitats from all over the world then visit the hundreds of wonderful threads on the SRGC Forum. As well as plants we have a wildlife topic where all sorts of animals, birds and insects appear. If you have a nervous disposition or a fear of spiders I suggest that you finish looking at this bulb log here, if you have no fear then enjoy the final two images on the next page.

BEWARE OF SPIDERS



Spider

Maggi let out a mighty scream as she discovered this wonderful large specimen crawling in the kitchen sink.

