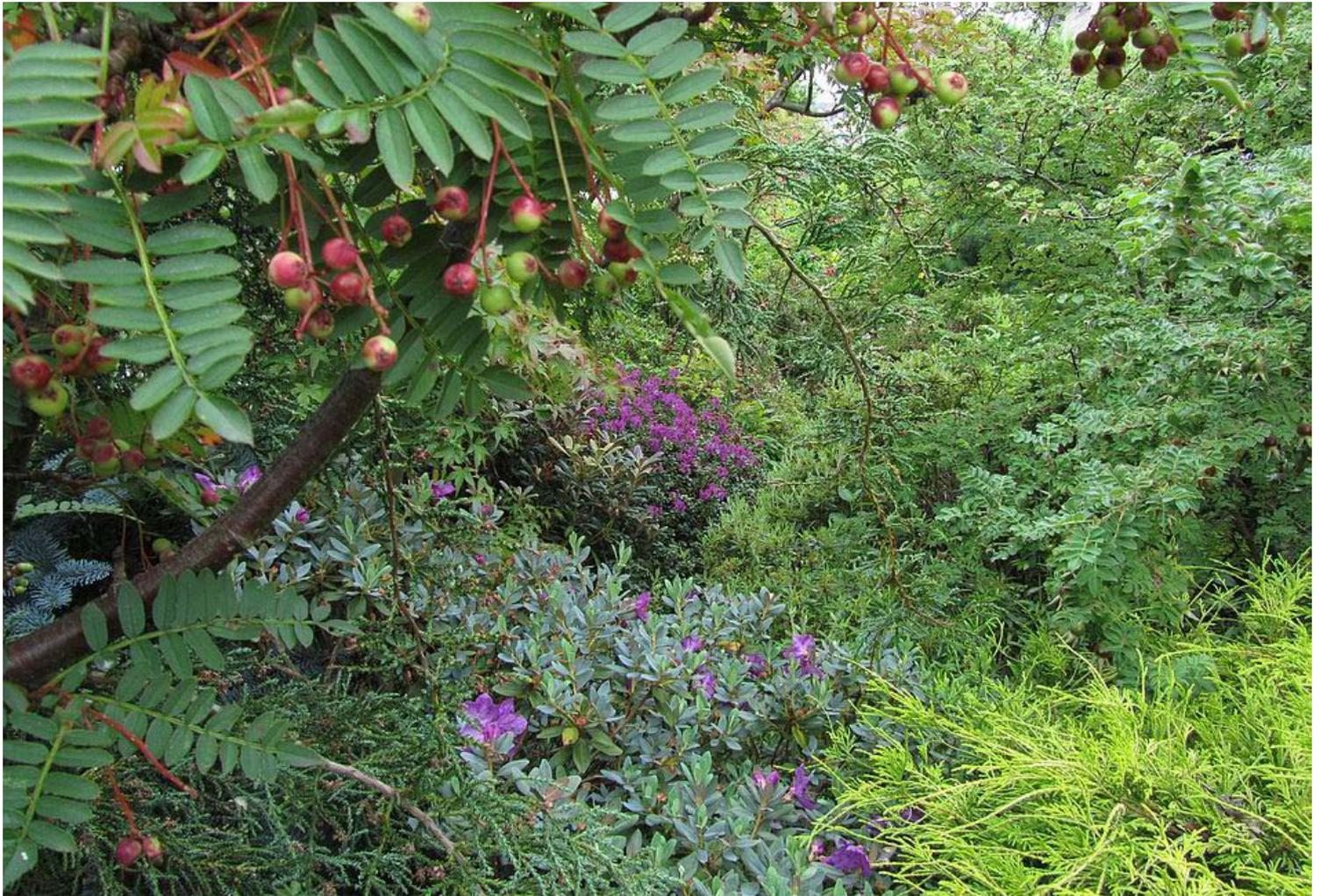




BULB LOG 30.....27th July 2011



It is mostly trees and shrubs that dominate n the jungle that is our front garden. It provides nice privacy for us as we are completely screened from passers-by and at the same time it is excellent habitat for wildlife especially birds



who will soon start to feed on the Sorbus berries. The forecasters who were predicting that we would have a scorching hot summer could not have got it more wrong as our daily highs in Aberdeen have not crept above 13C for around a week. A large chunk of low pressure is stuck over the North Sea just to the East of us and that is responsible for the cold wet and very windy weather conditions. If you grow a wide range of plants it does not matter what the seasonal weather brings something will always do well. In the cool moist conditions it is the Rhododendrons that are displaying their approval as many of them are producing a

second flush of flowers.



Rhododendron saluense always produces a second flush of flowers in our garden. Most Himalayan plants grow better in cool moist summers when the plants are not stressed by heat and or drought conditions



Rhododendron cephalanthum



I love *Rhododendron cephalanthum* with its tiny dark green leaves covered in white spots that surround pores in the leaf surface. The tiny bunches of clear pink flowers can cover the plant in the spring but this plant is responding to the good conditions by giving us a bonus display in summer.



Rhododendron seedling

We have a number of dwarf *Rhododendrons* growing along the peat wall, which is raised up on the eastern side by a drystone dyke about a metre high, and over the years lichens and mosses have grown on the stones. Just as in the wild lichens are often the first to gain a foothold on the rocks – they in turn provide mosses with a suitable habitat to grow; then, if favourable conditions prevail, higher plant life can

take hold. This is at least the third year that this *Rhododendron* seedling has been growing here and I am torn between moving it to a situation that I know it will survive in so that we can see it live to flower or leaving it to see how it will survive in this habitat. I am of course going to leave it.



Rhododendron re-growth

Earlier in the year I cut back some of the dwarf rhododendrons that had over thirty years become straggly and taken over another bed so it was difficult to have other plants growing around them. This picture shows how they have responded by producing a mass of new growth which I hope to form into a nice plant that will last another thirty years. When I cut them back I took some cuttings which I hope will root but I will take a few more as I thin out some of this new growth because in my experience these growths are the best rooters.

Cassiope fastigiata x wardii

I also cut back this plant of *Cassiope fastigiata x wardii* at the same time. I know this caused some of you to take a sharp intake of breath as I attacked this scarce and desirable plant in this way but I had the experience of having done it before and the confidence to know that I could root cuttings, see last week's Bulb Log, and that the plant would shoot from the stumps.





Cassiope fastigiata x wardii

As you can see there is a mass of young growth appearing and in a year or two we will have a wonderful free flowering plant green all the way to the base. To aid this regeneration I have been giving it a liquid feed of tomato fertilizer every two weeks or so. I work from time to time with BBC Radio Scotland on a live phone in gardening programme

and one of the most common questions is “when is the best time to...” – it could be prune, plant, split, all most any task. What the callers want is a time – like third week in July – but gardening is not fixed to time like that, it is the conditions that are all important. The weather being the critical factor as it affects the state of growth the plants will be in. Cutting back to regenerate a plant like the Rhododendron and Cassiope above should be done early in the year to allow the plant to use all its energy making the new growth that you want but not so early that that new growth could be exposed to frost damage. On the other hand, trimming established hedges should be done after the flush of new growth as there you want to keep the hedge green but limit the growth as much as possible – so I will aim to cut our hedges late in August.

Gardening is all about common sense and understanding the plants’ needs – I learnt the lesson of timings when I first started to take cuttings ; I kept a log of the date I took the cutting and the date it rooted. I thought that after a few years I would have a reference to tell me the best date to take cuttings from all the different plants we grow. I quickly realized that it was the conditions and stage of growth that were all important and these will vary not only

from place to place but also from year to year. – the plants follow the seasons not a calendar.



Lifting Meconopsis

I would not normally recommend transplanting Meconopsis in July when they may be hot and dry and under some degree of stress as they try to survive - however our conditions just now are ideal.

There is plenty moisture around to keep the plants turgid and there is enough warmth in the soil to allow the roots to grow and establish in their new location so now is the ideal time for us. The gravel paths where plants self seed so freely have become our seed beds where seeds often grow on better than in our seed frames.



Allium prattii Actaea rubra

Both these plants have self seeded - the Actea can become a bit of a nuisance but unwanted plants can be easily weeded however I am happy to allow Allium prattii to go where it wants.



Dactylorhiza seed pods

There are many of the Dactylorhiza forming nice fat seedpods just now and I will scatter this seed around the troughs and beds where some of it may germinate and grow on.

It is also just when the flowers have gone past that I will lift and divide any plants that are becoming too congested or are ones for which I want to maximize the rate of vegetative increase.

I will return to this subject in the coming weeks.



self seeding alpines

For many years we collected all our seed carefully sowing it into pots in the seed frames only to plant the seedlings back out when they were big enough.

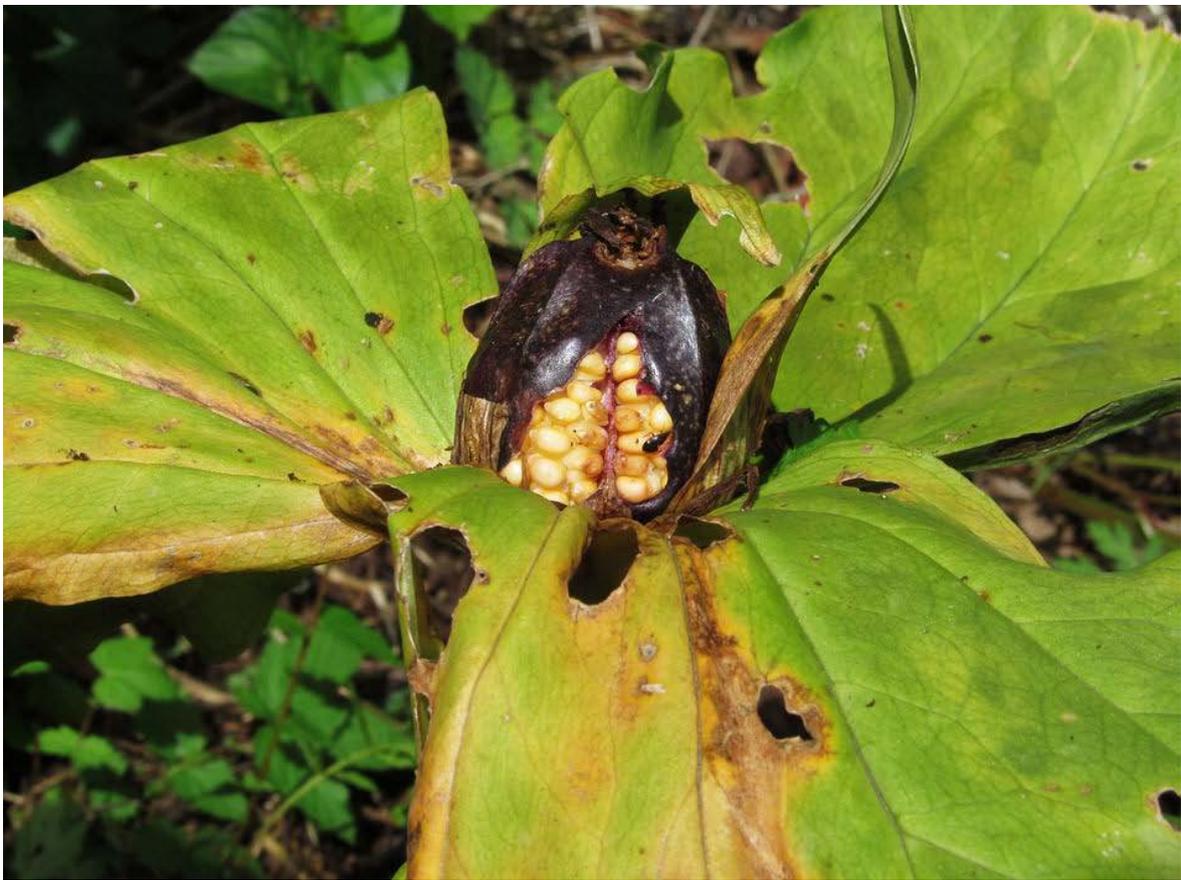
Now I am more likely to allow the plants to self seed or I will gather the seeds and distribute them around the garden so we get colonies of plants. I am not recommending that you should all do this or indeed that I do not still collect some seeds and sow them into pots but when you have lots of a plant and it produces plenty of seeds it is nice to allow nature to help with your planting.

I do not know for sure where this white Roscoea came from. I do remember planting a lot of plants from the seed frames here a few years ago and I suspect that this is one of those. It is certainly very nice to have another white form and if it sets seed I will collect and grow it on in pots to see if it comes true from seed.



Roscoea white seedling





Trillium seed pod

I noticed that something has eaten the outside of the seedpod of this Trillium exposing the neat rows of nearly ripe seeds. In fact these seeds are probably fully mature and viable now and all that happens in the plant is that slowly the seed capsule will open or disintegrate to allow the seeds to disperse.



Hesperantha baurii

Here is a 7cm pot of seedlings that I got as *Olsynium junceum* from the SRGC seed exchange. Sown in January last year, 2010, they have been kept outside uncovered in one of the many polystyrene fish boxes that act as an over flow for our frames.

I knew last year when they produced their first leaves that they were not *Olsynium junceum*, or *Sisyrinchium* as we used to know it, because they had flat leaves not the rounded rush like leaves suggested by the specific name however it is only now they are in flower that we can identify the plant as *Hesperantha baurii* from the Drakensburg Mountains of South Africa.

Had I known this I may have offered them some winter protection but it is good to know that they have survived all the cold and wet that our recent winters have thrown at them and of course summer rainfall is what they experience in nature.

When they have finished flowering I hope to get some seeds then I will plant them out into the garden to see how they survive. Eighteen months from seed to flowering plant should encourage all of you that do not

grow from seed to have a go as it will not be long before you can enjoy the pleasures of what you sow. I still hope to get some seed of *Olsynium junceum* some day.



Hesperantha baurii

I do appeal to all of you to try and verify the names of your plants before you pass them on or send them into the seed exchanges. I grew the Lily below from *Lilium* sp. seeds from another years seed exchange and now have to try and identify it. I suspect it may be a North American species – any suggestions are welcome.





Codonopsis grey-wilsonii

Continuing the thread of Himalayan plants that thrive in our cool summers the first flowers of *Codonopsis grey-wilsonii* are just opening and provided the conditions stay moist it will flower for six to eight weeks.



Clematis barbellata

The *Codonopsis* is growing up through another Himalayan climber *Clematis barbellata* that has its peak flowering in the spring. Like the *Rhododendrons* it will flower again in mid to late summer provided growing conditions are to its liking. It is a subtle plant with flowers that are easy to miss and I am sure that a number of the post conference visitors who came in April when it was in full flower never noticed it at all.



Cyananthus lobatus

Yet another of these Himalayan plants enjoying cool moist summers is the herbaceous mat forming *Cyananthus lobatus*. It is unfortunate that it holds its flowers around the perimeter leaving the centre green but then nature did not intend it to evolve to attract humans rather it evolved to spread its flowers out to attract pollinating insects.



Cyananthus lobatus

It is a very welcome plant producing these lovely blue/violet flowers over a number of weeks at this time of year.
N.B. With all this talk of seed, don't forget to send some seed to the Seed Exchange!



***Saxifraga brunonis* (syn. *S. brunoniana*)**

This is the first time we have flowered this lovely Himalayan saxifrage. I love the masses of red thread like runners that it sends out from its bright green rosette which are attractive enough in their own way but when the yellow flowers are added in it is just a joy to have it running around this trough. I am especially pleased by the way the runners plant new rosettes to grow in the middle of one of its eastern cousins which remind me of the fascinating plant communities that I have seen in the wild and from which we can learn so much.

