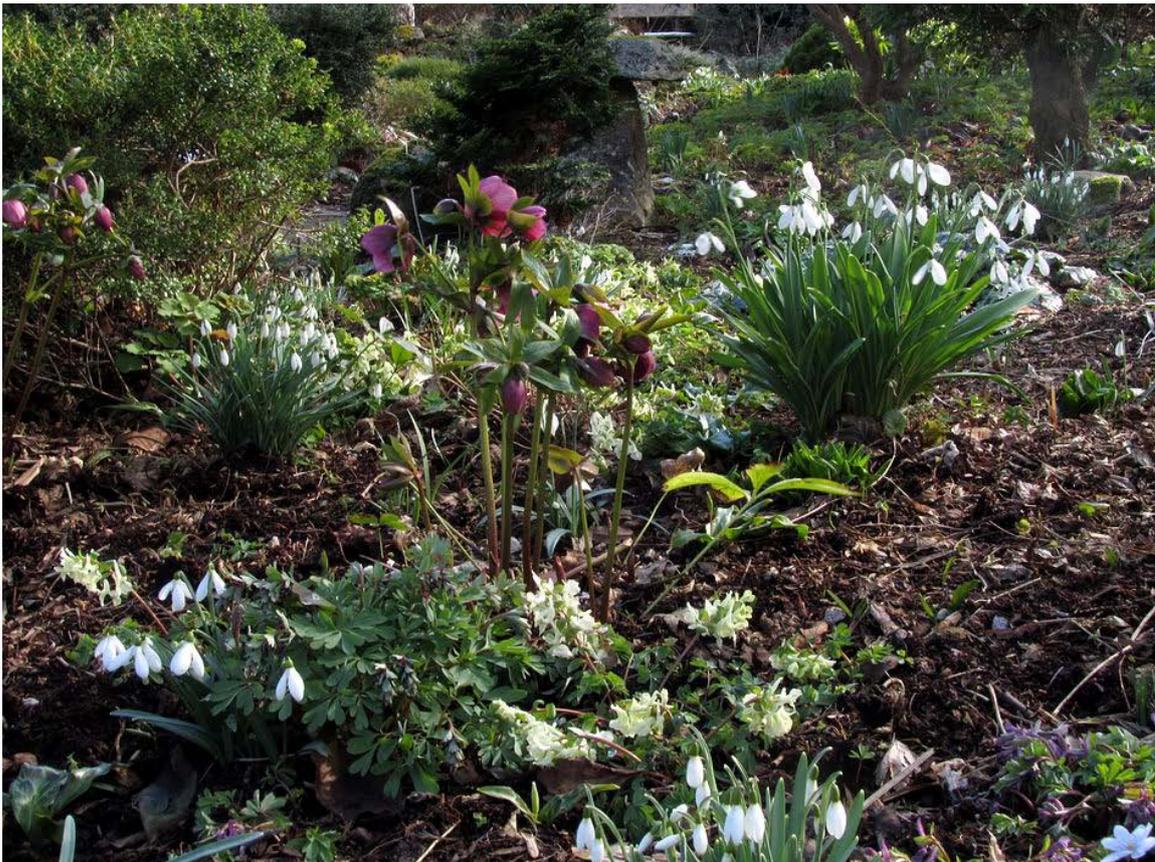




BULB LOG 14.....3rd April 2013



Like most of Northern Europe we are experiencing one of the coldest starts to spring for many a year – every day



we wake to a white world as fresh snow has fallen during the night. While many people are moaning about these conditions I prefer them to those of recent years where we have had a period of exceptionally warm weather in March or April, encouraging the bulbs to react, as they have evolved to do by springing into bloom, only to be hit as winter conditions return a few days later. During the day the sun comes out, the frosts lift and the snow slowly melts away encouraging some flowers to open.



Next morning the snow is back once more covering the ground and flowers – then depending when the sunshine breaks through the snow melts away leaving the flowers, and the gardeners, to enjoy the brief warming of its rays.



The large Dutch crocus is a survivor from our original planting of bulbs some 40 years ago – some are quick to deride these cultivars preferring the species such as the gloriously yellow *Crocus herbertii* above. I try not to be a plant snob enjoying all healthy plants be they common or rare and you have to be impressed that a number of these large *Crocus* cultivars are still gracing our garden after all those years.



Next morning the snow is back again but these hardy flowers remain unaffected by the daily covering of snow and quickly open their flowers to the slightest rise in temperature.



The beauty of this large Crocus is best seen in the contrasting colour and texture combination between of the pollen, style and petals.



Despite the cold the evidence of spring is everywhere making me think that it cannot be temperature alone that triggers these bulbous species into growth – no doubt they respond rapidly to any sudden warmth but their slow steady growth, even during the cold, suggests that it is something more complex that spurs this activity.



Hepatica transylvanica



Galanthus woronowii

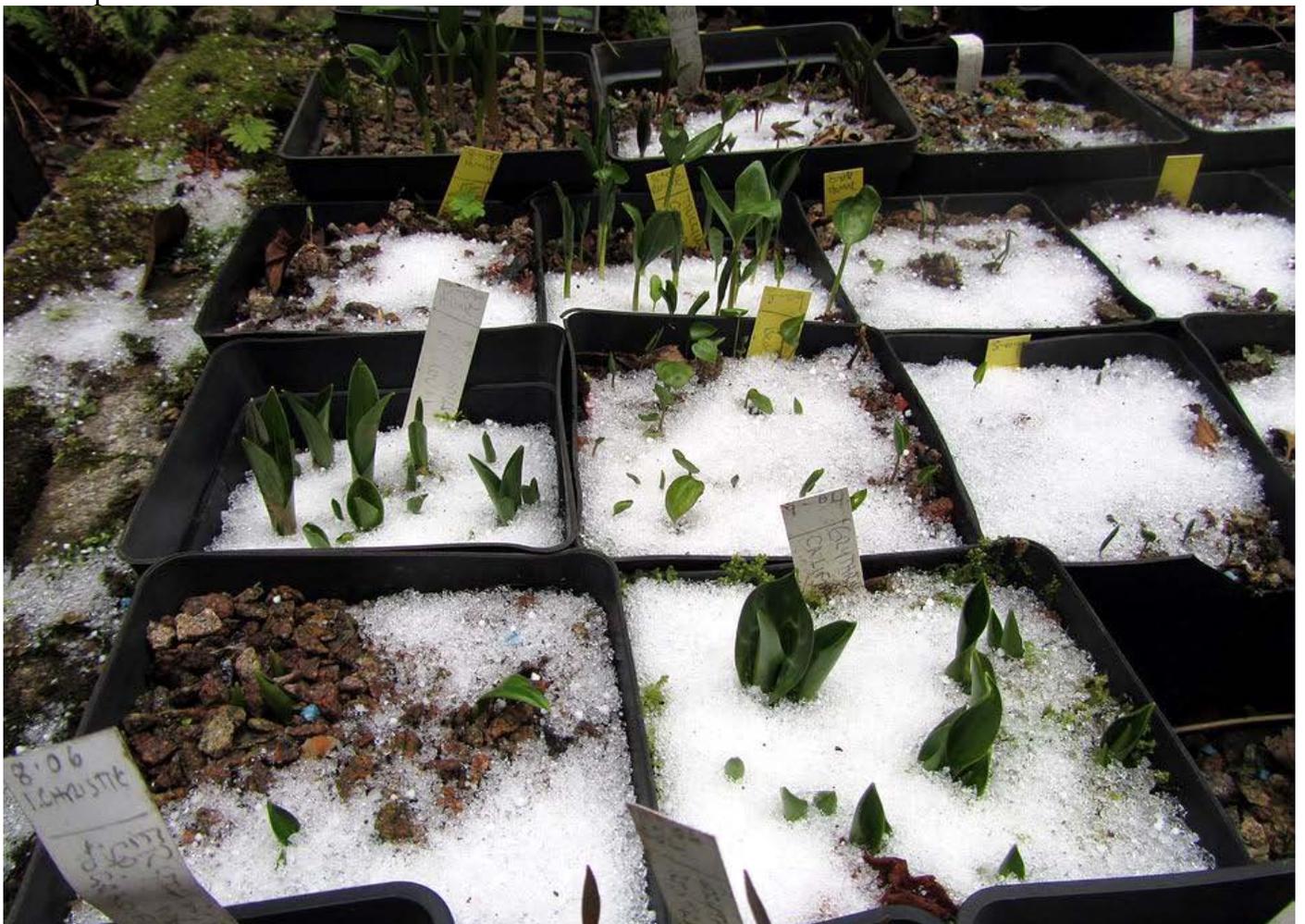


Galanthus and Corydalis malkensis

Over my years as a gardener I have come to appreciate the lessons I can learn from nature. Many gardens are decorated with mature specimen plants only - often standing in their own bit of territory kept clear of other plants and weeds by the gardener. Contrast this with what we see in nature where plants of all ages, from germinating seedlings up to plants in old age, will be growing in self generating colonies growing with and through other plants – for many years this is what I have been trying to mimic in our garden by allowing plants to self seed without my intervention.



Here you can see a group of Galanthus seedlings germinating where they shed from last year's seed pod near the base of the parent.



I do still sow plenty of seed in pots. This snowy scene from the seed frames shows how tough the seedlings are as these young seedling leaves are mostly untouched by the snow and light frosts.



Here a group of young *Trillium grandiflorum* leaves are extending. Growing them unprotected in this way helps



select those that can best withstand our gardens conditions. Any seedlings that do not like our cold conditions will perish in the first year of two of growth leaving the plants best adapted to life in an Aberdeen garden to grow to maturity. By the process of natural selection each subsequent generation of seed from our own garden will become finer tuned to our growing conditions.

On the left some ***Trillium ovatum maculatum*** seedlings are now old enough to display the dark marks on the leaves that distinguishes this variety from the usual plain green leaved forms. Like *Erythronums* the pattern on the leaves does not develop fully until the seedlings are around 3 to 5 years old



Leucojum vernum

Many bulbs, like this *Leucojum vernum*, form clumps in our gardens. In the wild most bulbs are seen as singles with clumps being a rarity – why is this I have often asked myself? I do have a hypothesis which is that in the wild a clump forming bulb is at a disadvantage because as the number of bulbs in the clump increases there is simply not enough water and nutrients to support all the bulbs in the clump. In time they will stop flowering so they cannot pass on their genes and eventually they will dwindle away. Now if you were collecting for the garden from a wild population of bulbs you would be immediately drawn to the showy clump-forming one which once in the garden would be at an advantage because it is favoured by the gardener who will lift and split it on a regular basis meaning that clump formers are more common in our gardens. So the lesson I take from nature is that that to keep them healthy and flowering freely I need to divide clumps of bulbs around every three years – and besides I enjoy seeing the individual flowers and do not like it when clumps become so crowded that you can only see it as a mass spectacle and cannot appreciate the simple beauty of each and every flower.

If you look carefully around the clump of *Leucojum* you will see a lot of seedlings of varying ages (detail on the right) are growing so in a few years we will have masses. It is more work to keep splitting clumps of bulbs but it is a task that I will try and keep up with.





Self seeding also gives us mixed groups as you see in this group of Crocus above. I much prefer the visual display of a mixed group to that of a mass planting of a single clone such as the group of *Crocus sieberi tricolor* below.



As beautiful as it is this clonal group of ***Crocus sieberi tricolor*** has never set any seeds for me. I do not know if it is a sterile clone or that the conditions when it is in flower in our garden have just not been favourable to fertilisation.



Erythronium dens canis and **Erythronium revolutum** have well developed flowers which will open when we get a bit more sunshine to warm the air.



I encourage Erythroniums to self seed all over our garden - in the foreground you will see seedling leaves of varying ages.



The other interesting thing about our variable climate is that no two years are the same with different plant combinations flowering at slightly different times. In recent years the Galanthus were nearly all past flowering by the time the Corydalis started to open but this year the snow drops are still opening as Corydalis malkensis flowers.



A new day brings fresh snow this time covering the sand plunge bulb bed with the humus bed in the distance.



By early afternoon the sun has melted away the snow and the flowers open as the air warms up a bit.



The Crocus especially enjoy the sunshine.



Corydalis, Galanthus and Leucojum



This colourful scene with **Primula cashmiriana**, **Corydalis solida** and **Erythronium dens canis** in the background seems a suitable place to end this week's Bulb Log.....