



BULB LOG 42.....16th October 2013



While I can admire the layout of a formal garden and all the work that goes into maintaining it in good order it is



not a style that I could ever adopt. My style of gardening is perhaps the very opposite of formality as I try and mimic the chaos of nature – making environments, introducing plants then watching what happens. Layout and design are just as important to our naturalistic style as they are in formal gardens. Most of us start out with a rectangular plot of whatever size to work with but I do not see it as a rectangle but a cube.

To me the most critical dimension in any garden that literally lifts it above the average design of many gardens is when you fully utilise the height of plants.



Planting trees and shrubs immediately adds this extra dimension giving you the feeling of being **in** a garden not just **on** it – hugged to the ground by an overhead canopy. In addition to the design aspect trees and shrubs help us to create a number of very different habitats such as light and shade within a relatively small garden. Having established this structure we can then look to the under planting which just like in a natural woodland can be very rich, diverse and seasonal.



This is where we use bulbs trying to achieve as many weeks of flower colour in the garden as our climate allows.

Starting in February with the late winter flowering bulbs the very popular Galanthus, the snow-drops, can be in flower from early to late winter but do not overlook the Snowflake, Leucojums, which are equally deserving of our close attention.

The blooming of Eranthis hyemalis in the late winter is a real joy to me as it is the first flower of the year to hold its face up towards the sky.



Both Galanthus and Leucojum hold their flowers in a drooping manner to help protect the reproductive parts from the weather but the Eranthis is bold with bright yellow flowers that stare skywards. If left to self-seed all of these bulbs will naturalise, forming spreading colonies of seedlings and you will find that these seedlings, each a different clone, will become more fertile than clonal plantings that you increase by division of the clumps of bulbs.



We encourage this naturalisation within in the garden for a number of reasons- first it gives us plenty healthy offspring with all the vigour of youth, second we get to enjoy the variations found within the various species and of course hybrids also occur.

Third and in keeping with a natural habitat it gives us plants of all ages from seedlings to maturity – formal gardens tend to only have mature specimen plants.



The reticulate Iris species also flower early and look so delicate with their flamboyant flower structure but this belies just how tough they are.



They are able to withstand all the frost and snow our weather throws at them.



As the season advances the next wave of bulbous plants come into flower, Crocus in all their great variety with the harmony of the mixed colours balanced by the white of Galanthus and Leucojum.



Corydalis solida brings the hot colours from purples through pinks to red filling the garden with colour as early as mid-March in some years. It is only by using these plants that you can bring this mass of hotter colours into the garden so early in the year. They increase by division of the bulbs (which are best divided every other year) and by seed.

We can grow these plants side by side with the Galanthus etc as they enjoy similar growing conditions and as they tend to come into flower as the first flowers of the year are just going over extend the flowering season of a bed. By carefully selecting bulbs and other plants you can have several phases of flowering in the same bed.



Erythronium, Fritillaria and Anemone bring in the third phase of flowering in the very same beds and depending on the weather pattern in any particular year these three phases can merge or be separated as the different plants respond to the ever changing temperatures. Our spring is not clearly defined and depending on which way the wind is blowing we can drift from winter to spring and back to winter again several times in any year.



No spring garden can be complete without some Narcissus and our preference is for the smaller species such as *Narcissus cyclamineus*, *N. asturiensis* and their hybrids whose scale fits in well with our mixed plantings.



The first Erythronium to flower is always *Erythronium caucasicum* followed some weeks later by its close relative *Erythronium dens-canis* then *E. sibericum* and *E. japonicum* come later still.



Erythronium sibericum.

To be continued.....