

BULB LOG 38.....18th September 2013**Allium wallichii**

We first grew *Allium wallichii* from ACE seed, planting the whole pot of seedlings out in a clump when they were almost flowering size. Since then we have allowed a number of them to self-sow and they have indeed naturalised forming the great mass of flowering stems shown above. Individually their flowers are not the showiest nor do they seem to have a strong scent but they are extremely efficient at attracting a constant procession of hoverflies and wasps when the weather conditions are favourable – these result in successful pollination and good seed set and so this population can continue naturalising.



Colchicum flowers continue to appear bringing very welcome colour to the often shaded autumn garden. Two of my constant grumbles are first; people who call Colchicums ‘Autumn Crocus’- this is just wrong and misleading and should be stopped – being in the **Colchicaceae** formerly included in the Liliaceae they are not even in the same

family as Crocus which are Iridaceae. Why can't we call them ‘Colchicums’ or ‘Autumn Colchicums’ as there are also spring flowering species? My second grump is that these poor plants are often maligned because they have the audacity to grow leaves-how dare they? There are few plants that do not have leaves and as long as you are an intelligent gardener and understand that the flowers can come many months before the leaves appear and take this into account when you plant them, you too can enjoy this autumn splendour.



Crocus speciosus and **Cyclamen hederifolium** also brighten up the garden at this time of year and as they are much smaller in stature they can be planted in beds with smaller plants.



Narcissus leaves

Since I applied the first storm in the bulb houses at the beginning of the month some leaves have started to appear mostly from *Narcissus romieuxii* and its relatives. Once you have watered the bulbs it is essential that you do not let them dry out because even though you see no signs of growth above ground the plants are in active growth and reliant on water to sustain them. My rule of thumb is to water in proportion to the amount of leaves showing and as we have had some warm bright sunny days I have watered the pots showing leaves – the other pots will get fully soaked again when I apply the second of the autumn storms at the beginning of October. Judging when to water is a matter of experience of your own conditions and as I have some completely new plunges I have to judge anew when water is required.



Muscari species, Turkey

This lovely small *Muscari* species is always one of the earliest to come to leaf. As well as watching to ensure these plants do not dry out the other important issue at this time of year is to watch out for aphids. It is still warm enough under glass for these sap-suckers to be attracted to the fresh greens that are appearing and a lot of damage can be done if you are not vigilant. Regular inspection and a quick wipe out between fingers and thumb will control of any of the insects without the need to revert to chemicals.

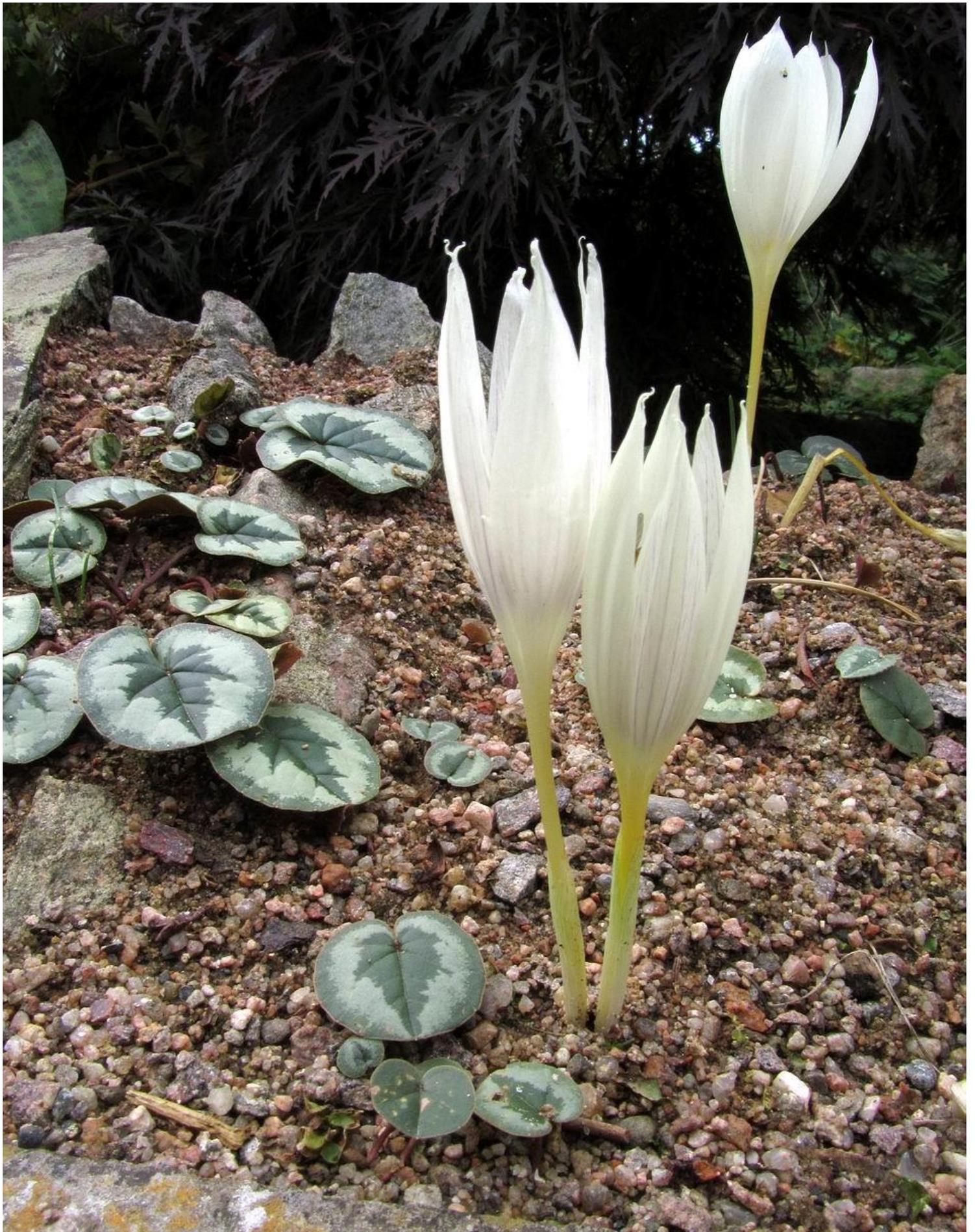


Sternbergia sicula

Two different forms.

A few winters ago we suffered long periods of severe frosts which wiped out most of our *Sternbergia sicula* bulbs. I was resigned by this disappointment to give in to the elements and give up trying to grow these charming plants in our northern garden - however a few generous friends sent me gifts of bulbs from their collections. How pleased I am that they did as I am again enjoying the bright yellow flowers and can continue to try and work out the relationships between *Sternbergia lutea*, *sicula* and *greuteriana*.

I have often put lack of flowering down to lack of heat in our summers but I cannot use that as excuse this year as like many we have had an almost record hot summer. What I am discovering is that some of the clones I lost to the frosts were old, tired and possibly diseased which did not help in my efforts to get them to flower. Many of the gifts I received were of seed raised bulbs of wild origin and as such I am finding that they flower much better.



***Crocus vallicola* and *Cyclamen coum* leaves**

Perhaps because it grows so well in our garden *Crocus vallicola* is among my favourites in this wonderful genus. It is recognised by the thread extended tips to the petals which can be so extreme that sometimes they entangle preventing the flowers from popping open until they are fully mature and the weather is warm. Perhaps this adaptation has proved an advantage protecting the stigma and anthers until they are ripe and the weather is suitable for pollination.



Crocus suworowianus

Crocus suworowianus looks very similar and can have slightly pointed tips as shown above but never as extreme as those of *C. vallicola*.



Often shown as a sub-species of *Crocus kotschyanus*, this is only the second year that we have flowered **C. suworowianus** and the first flower that appeared for us lacked the yellow markings. Here (above) the second seedling to reach flowering size has the yellow spots.



Crocus suworowianus

With these yellow spots it is superficially very like *C. vallicola*, shown below, but careful observation of the petals will reveal different shapes and the corms of *C. suworowianus* lie vertically orientated in the ground as shown in Janis Ruksans' book ['Crocuses'](#) which is an essential reference for anyone interested in this genus.



Crocus vallicola



Yellow spots can be present or absent in *Crocus vallicola* as can the violet lines so there is variation.



Crocus vallicola

You might think as I did, that these variations are clonal with some having no apparent markings while others can be well marked but the picture above shows two flowers arising from a single corm.

The first to appear, the large one on the left above, has very faint traces of yellow spots while the second flower to appear from the same corm has well defined spots.

These flowers are the two on the right of the pot on the left and you can see clearly that they are rising from the same corm.



Sand plunge

Crocus flowers, and a Colchicum towards the top right, are appearing quickly now in the sand beds. I continue to be convinced of the value of growing bulbs in nothing but sharp sand where most seem to thrive.

Crocus nudiflorus 'Orla' tends to have a slight dirty colour when it first appears turning pure white as it ages. In this picture you will see the two stems marked have a faint purple wash while the others do not. I have raised seedlings from 'Orla' and selected some pure white forms but the largest majority of seedlings revert to the typical deep purple colour. I am now wondering why we suddenly have such a mix in this group.

Below, the same group a day later shows more clearly the colour difference. If some have self-seeded into this clonal group I would expect a lot of purple forms so it seems doubtful that has happened - perhaps this colouration is variable.

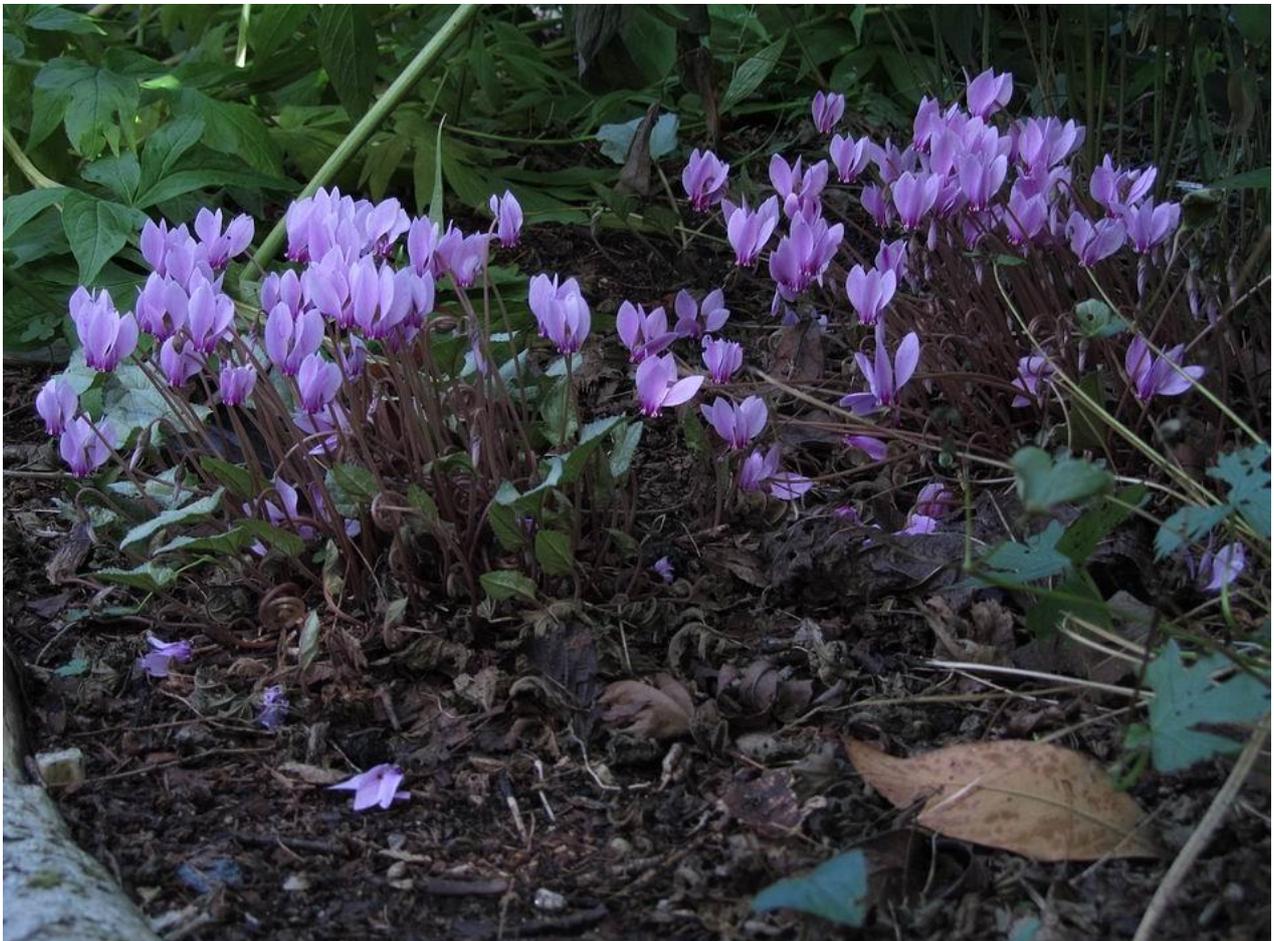


Crocus nudiflorus 'Orla'



I have never observed this colour wash in any of my selected white seedlings.

**Selected white seedling ex
Crocus 'Orla'**



Cyclamen hederifolium



Another few pictures of this community of *Hepatica* with its patterned leaves and *Cyclamen hederifolium* with silver washed leaves both to illustrate the beauty of this chance planting and the difference the camera angle can make can make to a picture. Above I am holding the camera looking slightly down and across the group.



I placed the camera on the ground to get this low level view, it is always worth experimenting