



BULB LOG 36.....7th September 2016



This week's cover picture shows **Crocus vallicola** and **Cyclamen hederifolium** growing in one of the outside sand beds heralding that we are now into autumn.



The flower shoots of **Crocus nudiflorus 'Orla'** (a white form) push through in one of the Erythronium sand plunges where, like the Erythroniums, they are planted in a mesh pond basket. However that is not enough to contain this migratory species - shoots are appearing across the entire plunge; some are from self-scattered seed but the majority have spread by the tiny stolons produced from the corms escaping both over the top and through the mesh.



Weeding in one of the raised slab beds I accidentally dislodged these two Crocus corms showing the advanced stage of growth so I took the opportunity to photograph the growing roots and flower shoots. I planted them back carefully so as not to damage the fragile roots or shoots, then I watered them.



The first of this season's **Colchicum** flowers are also just starting to add their colours to the garden.



Colchicum tessellated hybrid.



Now we are into September regular readers will know that this is the time that I apply the first storm of the season in the bulb houses - as I was preparing the pots I noticed this flower bud appearing from the still dry pot of Colchicum indicating that the bulbs also know the time of year.



On the surface you may notice the small pellets of fertiliser that I have applied before the first watering. I started this last year, especially adding it to the pots that I had not re-planted, to provide nutrients to support the emerging roots and shoots. The fertiliser is a standard NPK 7-7-7 Growmore with a small pellet size. My reasoning behind this is that root and leaf growth are mostly fuelled by nitrogen so by adding a small quantity onto the surface the three main nutrients (NPK) will become available to support the developing roots.



I do not want to add too much which could be harmful to the emerging roots so I worked out an easy and quick way to measure the quantity. Depending on the size of the pot I added a pinch between my thumb and two fingers (above) to the 13cm pots and a one finger and thumb pinch (below) to the 9 and 7cm pots.

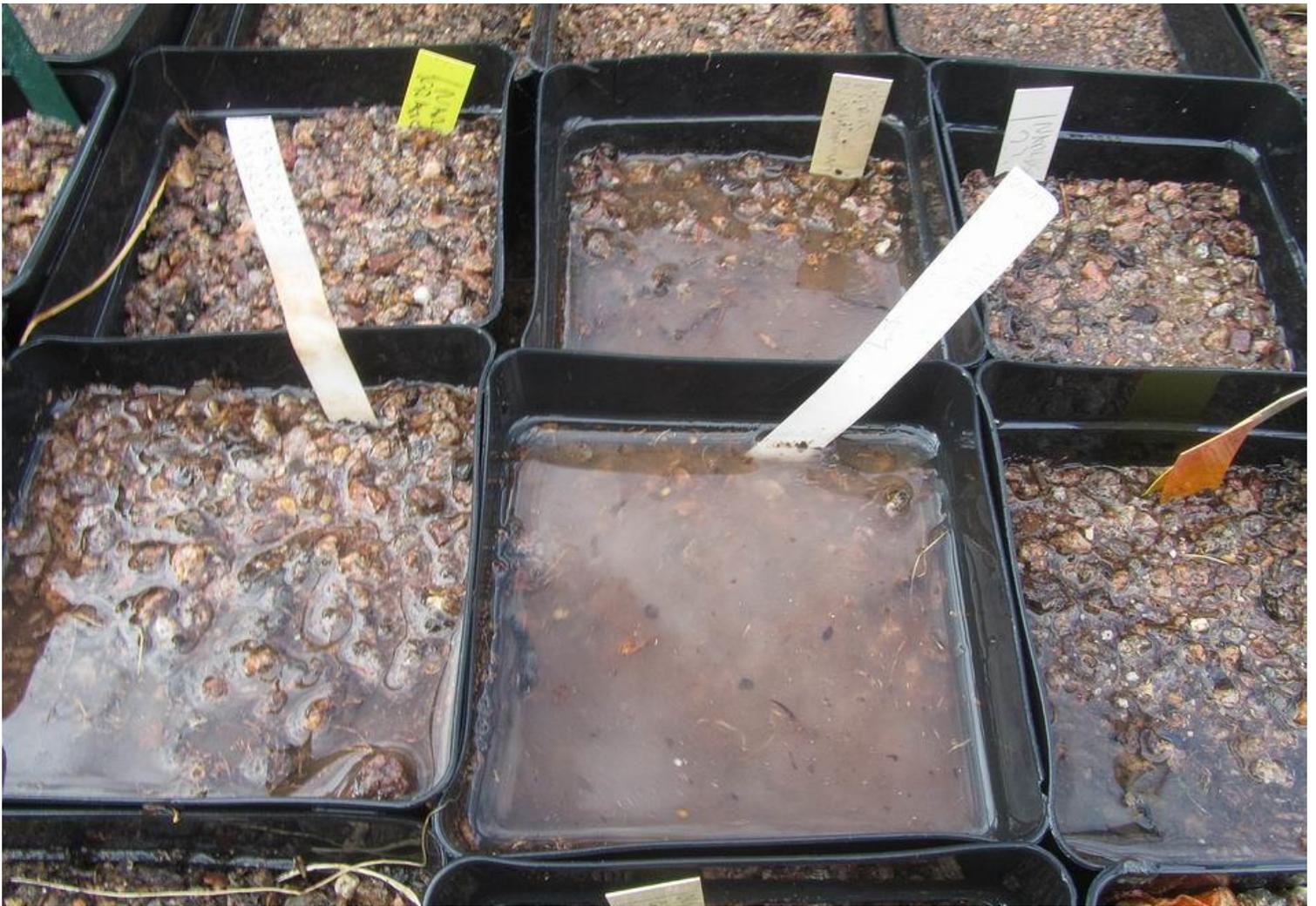




Here you can see the sprinkle of Growmore on the surface of a 13 cm pot, I will add a fresh gravel topdressing after watering.



The storm.



Each pot is flooded with water and allowed to drain before being flooded again – I repeat this process several times until I am sure that the potting mix and the sand plunger below are all thoroughly soaked. With the drainage system I built into the new plunges, which is described in [Bulb Log 3113](#), I am also able to see how much water drains away.



The sand beds also receive the watering where I pass methodically back and forward across the sand with a water spray until it is also soaked all the way through. My drainage system is especially helpful by letting me know when the sand is saturated and I was surprised how much water I applied before it started to drain out into the bucket below.



When I watered the sand a few bulbs appeared on the surface so I simply poked them back into the sand.



Click the link to view a [Bulb Log Video Diary Supplement](#) showing the first storm.



I was trying to capture the amazing light of the gloaming, the short period just after the sun dips below the horizon when it looks like the garden is bathed in wonderful stage lighting, however the image does not convey the glorious colours that we see with our eyes.



If the conditions are favourable many plants will produce a second flush of growth and or flowers. We have had a wet summer with relatively cool temperatures so the plants were never put under any stress so they have continued to grow and many like this **Celmisia spectabilis** produce bonus flowers.

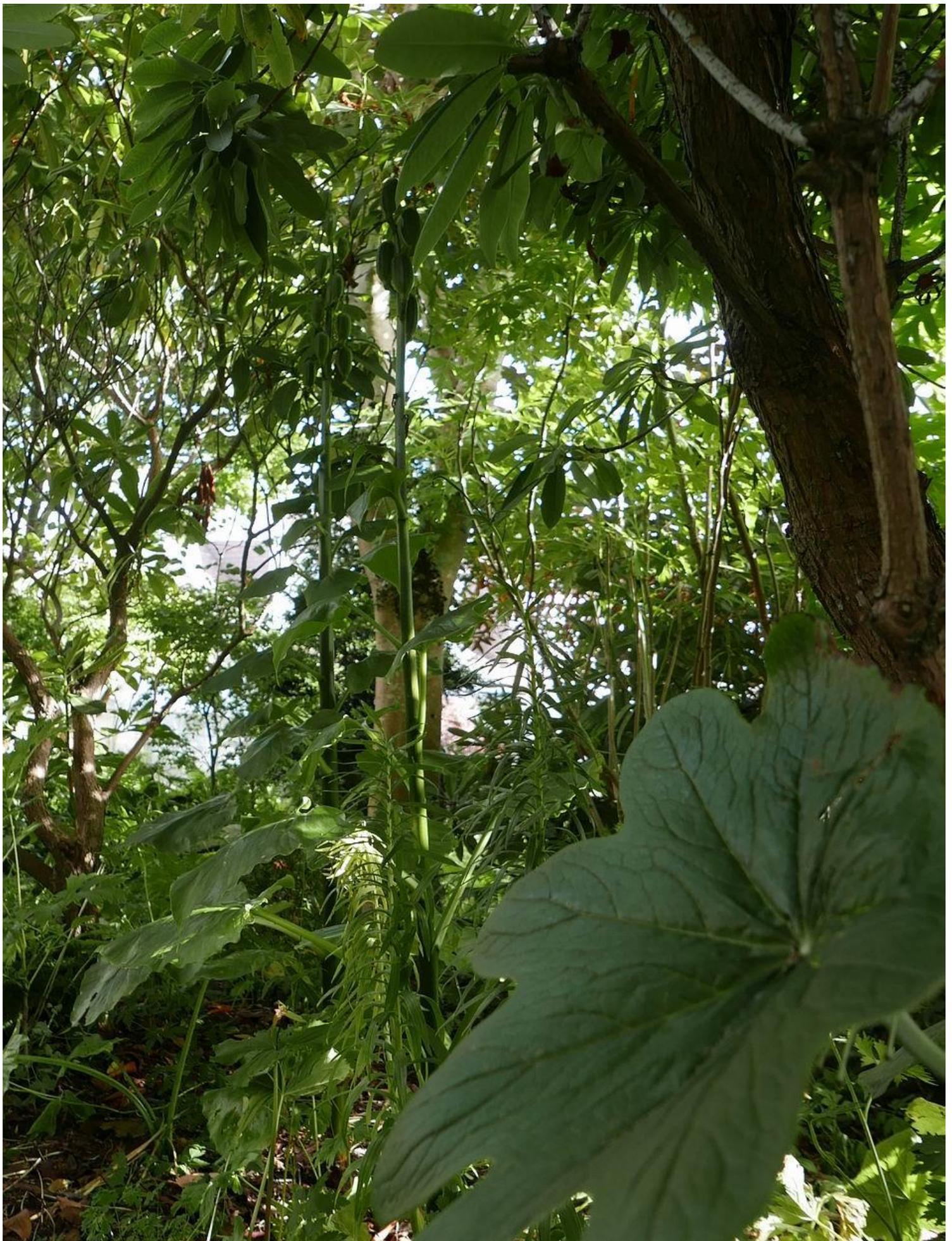
The massive amount of growth put on by many of our trees and shrubs means that we will have to do a lot of cutting back and thinning of the canopies over the autumn and winter.



Some plants have decided it is time to retreat underground to rest - the large leaves of **Arisaema wilsonii** have suddenly turned yellow and flopped over onto the surrounding *Celmisia* so they will have to be removed.



Elsewhere I discover I am too late to gather the seed from this *Roscoe* as it has already been scattered.



Can you spot the seed pods in this picture?

The giant stems of **Cardiocrinum** are topped off with large, fat, still-green pods full of seed which will not be ready for collecting until well into October or even November.



I draw (pun intended) no division between my gardening and my art as I see them as one and the same thing. I show the very first marks of a self-portrait drawing, after about ten minutes of work, it will now go on a journey as I add or take away marks on the paper. As part of the drawing process I will make mistakes then I have the choice to correct, remove or leave them because they add interest to the work. That is how the drawing develops; it may never be finished, unless it is taken away from me, because I will rework drawings making changes using new knowledge, skills or materials I have accrued over the ensuing time. This is exactly the same process gardeners go through as they develop their garden beds making the same choices correcting mistakes adding plants, removing plants, cutting back the growth of plants. All these actions taken by gardeners will be informed by increased knowledge, understanding and experience we gain over time– it is an ongoing process: gardens are never finished.



Troughs are similar to sketches – they offer an opportunity to try something out on a small scale before developing the idea on a larger size. It is also the case that sometimes you can never capture the dynamic nature achieved in a sketch in a larger more considered work and I think this is also the case with many troughs. Troughs give us the opportunity to try out plantings and combinations on a small scale but they often possess an allure that can never be repeated on a larger scale.



These tiny troughs were planted at a workshop I held in 2008 and now they have matured beautifully, with very little intervention from me, into vignettes that could have been plucked from a mountain side.



It is always nice when the plants mature and start to grow over the edge of the troughs.



Some people may be very tidy and trim everything back to the edge but I do not like that look. I like it when a plant breaks the line, softening the edge.



Sometimes you can have too much of a good thing such as where this mossy saxifrage has run rampant and is in danger of over-growing the trough completely so I will intervene and cut it back considerably.



On the other hand I think this silver saxifrage has formed a perfect balance with just enough growing over the side to break the line. Here also is where the accidental comes into play - the orchids all self-seeded into the saxifrage and my decision was to let them remain - I have removed some other plants which also self-seeded because I saw them as distracting from the harmony however the orchids are perfect.



The lumps of broken concrete that I used last year to landscape this trough looked a bit contrived at first but now the plants are growing hiding the cracks and in time it will give the appearance of being a single rocky outcrop.

As I am currently reworking my talk on troughs to bring it up to date I suspect you may see more of them in coming weeks.



This forest of self-sown **Allium wallichii** has flowers just starting to open making it a great plant to provide autumn flowers.



I sign off this week with a look at the first **Allium wallichii** flowers of this season.....