



SRGC

Bulb Log Diary

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*Helleborus orientalis*

I like each cover picture to be eye catching as well as reflecting some of the content within the pages of the Bulb Log. This week this emerging pale hellebore cultivar is the most advanced of the mid-winter flowers in the garden and makes a reasonably arresting image. It also rises through the autumn leaf fall, the clearing of which is still currently one of my main tasks, it also still has last season's foliage attached and this week I have been cutting off most of these old growths.



Because of the decorative value I like to leave the old, still green, leaf growth on both the hellebores and the ferns for as long as practical through the winter before I cut it off. You could reasonably suggest that we should do as nature does, leaving it to die back and decay - I have tried that and found that to get the best from these plants it is best to remove the old growth. Leaving the previous season's fern fronds on the plant slows down the growth of

the new ones - it also becomes more difficult to cut the old growth back when the new fronds start emerging and all the evidence of the mild winter suggest that we are heading into an early season.

There are always exceptions: for instance I will leave the still green old fronds on the ferns I planted to screen the view through to the compost heaps. This area was screened by the dense growth of shrubs until I cut it back a couple of years ago as part of my project to open the ground planting area. You can see that the growth of the ferns below the rhododendrons is now starting to hide the compost, and they will grow larger.





Hepatica transsilvanica like others in this genus also retain their old leaves through the winter in our garden and I judge when to remove these old leaves by observing the plants and as soon as I see signs of the new growth emerging I remove the old leaves to allow the flowers to grow unhindered.



With the old *Hepatica transsilvanica* leaves removed, the emerging growth buds, already showing colour, do not have to compete with the old leaves for light or space.



Can you see a difference in the mulch of leaves across the areas shown in this picture? The difference is the leaves in the left foreground have been through my hand held leaf-vac-shredder, well that is to say, my new one. After many years my old leaf-vac finally stopped working so I bought a new similar one that so far is proving even better in that it does not clog up so readily when lifting the wetter leaves. These machines do not work when the leaves are very wet but we had a dry spell long enough, aided by some wind, to dry the leaves out sufficiently to try my new machine.



The leaves on the left have been lifted, shredded then returned as a mulch, those on the right have not.

## **Eranthis hyemalis**

In the process of lifting the leaves I temporarily exposed some *Eranthis hyemalis* shoots and germinating seeds which I carefully covered again with the shredded leaves.

It is much easier for the new growth and seedlings to push through the shredded leaves because unlike the unprocessed ones they do not form a thick laminated mat when they get wet.



## **Eranthis pinnatifida**

Always among the earliest of the new year's flowers to appear are those of *Eranthis pinnatifida* and as you can see from this pot they are already rising up in preparation for the beautiful display that this small species brings us.

Last year I was frustrated when something pulled the flowers off some of the *Eranthis pinnatifida* we grow in pots. As it was most likely a bird, I am taking the precaution of providing the flowers with some protection this year.



While clearing the leaves from this bed, in addition to removing the fronds from the fern on the right, I was reminded of something else requiring my attention.



This group of *Galanthus nivalis* is looking very congested and would benefit from being divided.



There are two ideal times for completing any garden task: one is the most appropriate time in a plant's growth cycle and the other is the ideal time when the gardener is reminded and has the time - Molly agrees!



The ideal time to lift and divide any clump of bulbs is when they do not have active growth that could be damaged, that is, in the summer rest period. However I am now reminded and these bulbs will benefit from being carefully lifted divided and replanted allowing the roots to grow out into fresh ground during the second phase of root growth which coincides with the imminent leaf growth.

Disturbing the bulbs during growth will have some detrimental effect but is preferable to leaving them to get even more congested to the extent that they will stop flowering; indeed in this case it is the ideal time for the gardener. The ideal time for the bulb would be in the summer when they are resting but at that time other plants that share the same beds are in full growth and should not be disturbed.



With some spaced out and planted back into the same spot I have a box of spares to plant in other spots around the garden. Any slight damage to the roots will be compensated for by the lack of competition provided by the better growing conditions



I planted many of those spare snowdrops across this bed where we cut back the shrubs opening the ground planting area at the south end of the garden. It is along this boundary wall that the Ivy I showed in full flower last week grows. I received a number of positive comments about our use and reasons for growing the ivy so decided to expand on that here.

If not managed properly Ivy (*Hedera helix*) can be an invasive plant. It can overwhelm other plants, especially trees and shrubs, to the extent of smothering and killing them but with proper control Ivy is a valuable resource providing food and habitat for wild life in the garden.

Not much would grow along the heavily shaded north side of our southern wall so I have stacked pruned branches that are too big to go through my shredder there, both lying flat in piles and standing vertically against the wall.



I was going to write that I encouraged the Ivy to grow through the stacked branches - but the Ivy needs no encouragement it happily grows here but I do have to cut it back to prevent it growing into the trees and shrubs.



Ivy, *Hedera helix*, will only flower when it rises to a summit - once it achieves the advantage of the height then flowering growths will develop, these have a different leaf shape, shown in this picture. Note the shape of the leaves immediately below the flowers comparing them to the more typical leaves lower down and on the non-flowering branch also shown above.



This comparison picture shows a typical leaf (top left), a leaf from a flowering shoot and a rooted cutting of a tiny *Hedera helix* cultivar that we have grown for years.



This is the original plant we acquired over thirty years ago of this tiny, congested, slow growing cultivar of *Hedera helix*.



Even though I turned off the outside water which supplies the mist unit in November I am still taking cuttings, placing them in the sand which I keep moist by occasional hand watering. At this time of year the cuttings are not losing much through transpiration and many will root over the winter. Others will form calluses on the cut stem and be ready to root when I turn the mist back on in the warmer weather.



View looking north across the garden.



If this mild weather we are experiencing continues we could see an early flowering – the growth on these bulbs has very quickly pushed through the layer of mulch I recently added with the Galanthus buds already showing white.



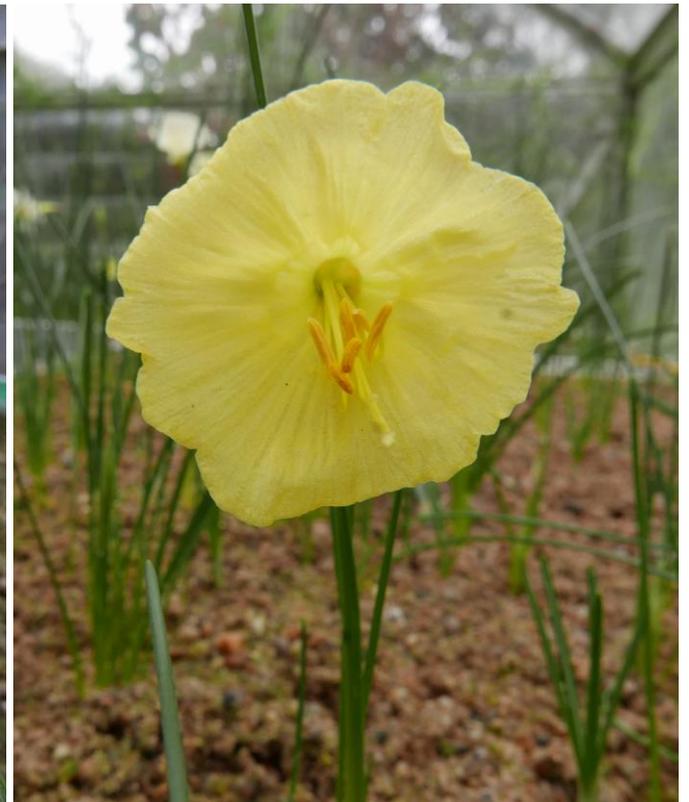
As these Galanthus shoots extend the roots will also be start the second stage of rapid root growth to support the increasing demands from the leaf and flower growth so providing sufficient watering for the pot grown plants is essential.



Among the Narcissus seedlings coming into flower we have white flowers associated with *Narcissus albidus* as described by Michael Salmon in his book 'A Survey of the Genus Narcissus' where he presents a very plausible case for the establishment of this species.



We also have pale yellow white buds that open to creamy white flowers these are related to plants we received as *Narcissus romieuxii* var *mesatlanticus* which is most likely part of a naturally occurring hybrid swarm.



These deep yellow flowered seedlings were raised from *Narcissus romieuxii*.



So many hybrids occur in this group of Narcissus, both in the wild and cultivation that it is often very difficult to definitively put a name to them but we should not let that stop us growing them from seed and enjoying the wonderful variation that these hybrids bring to our winter gardens.



I will leave you with one of my favourite yellow seedlings growing in the sand plunge.  
Click the link to join me in a walk in the first [Bulb Log Video Diary Supplement](#) of 2020.....