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Bulb Log Diary

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Pictures and text © Ian Young

BULB LOG 39.....23rd September 2020



Autumn flowering Crocus



It is once more the autumn flowering Crocus and Colchicum that I feature in this Bulb Log - because they are so decorative, bringing interest to the garden during these autumn months. They are not difficult to grow or rare species that I am showing they are generally widely available from better garden centres as well as the specialist bulb sellers.

The species shown in these pictures are mostly *Crocus banaticus*, *kotschyanus*, *pulchellus*, *nudiflorus*, *serotinus* and *speciosus* along with resulting hybrids. The eagle-eyed may also spot a few *Crocus vallicola* which grows very well in our cool moist garden but may not do so well in some hotter areas but then there are always other species that would prefer those areas with hot drier summer conditions.

The autumn flowering Crocus are usually described as 'late flowering' because they flower later in the year but in reality they are the early flowering species, flowering some months before the more commonly seen spring blooming ones.

If the flowers are pollinated and successfully fertilised they will hold on to their seed through the winter and the ripe pods will appear along with the spring flowering species.





Most corms will produce a number of flowers, each pushed above ground not by a stem but on a floral tube rising from the ovary which remains protected underground. The seed will slowly mature until in the spring a stem grows pushing the ripe capsule upwards above the ground although there are some where the seed pod barely breaks the surface. We encourage the plants to increase by seeding around.



I find the spontaneous hybrids that occurred in our garden produce the most flowers from a single corm.



The floral tube that holds the flowers is susceptible to getting bent by wind and heavy rain as well as being chewed by slugs or snails so enjoy them while they are perfect but even when they are bent over the flowers will still open as the air warms in the sunshine. The succession of flowers means that even though individuals may not last for very long others will take their place giving a flowering period of at least a few weeks.



Just to show us that Crocus can be a suitable crevice plant this hybrid has seeded in between the slabs and each year the number of flowers its sends up has gradually increased.



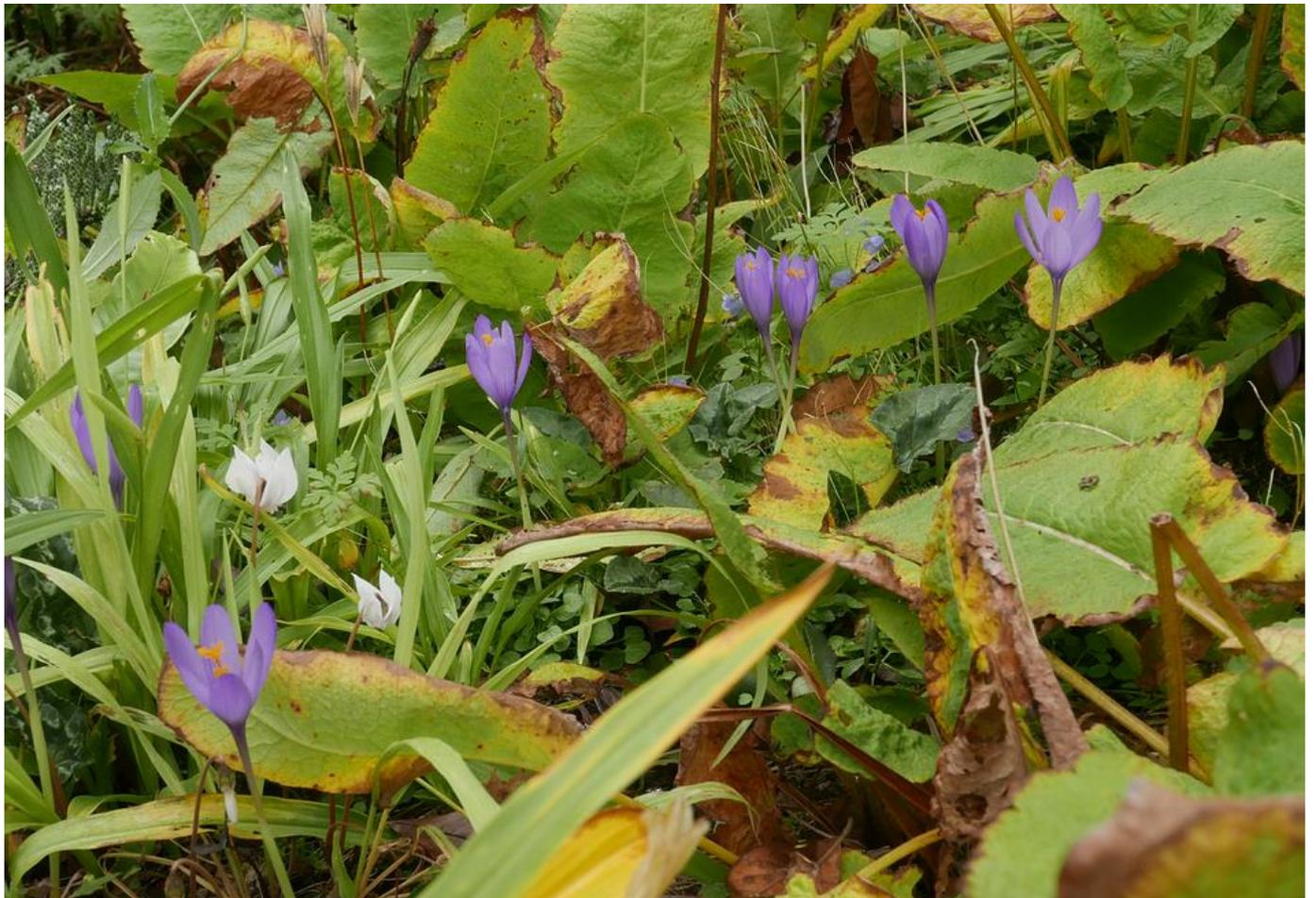
In recent days every **Crocus nudiflorus** that falls over has been replaced by at least two more appearing.



This scene of Crocus and Cyclamen growing through a mass of self-sown Roscoea typify the multi-layered planting style we have adopted where the plants are allowed to seed forming mixed colonies. The following sequence of images was taken over a few days in a small part of the rock garden bed.



A few days on from the previous picture a new wave of Crocus flowers have joined in the display

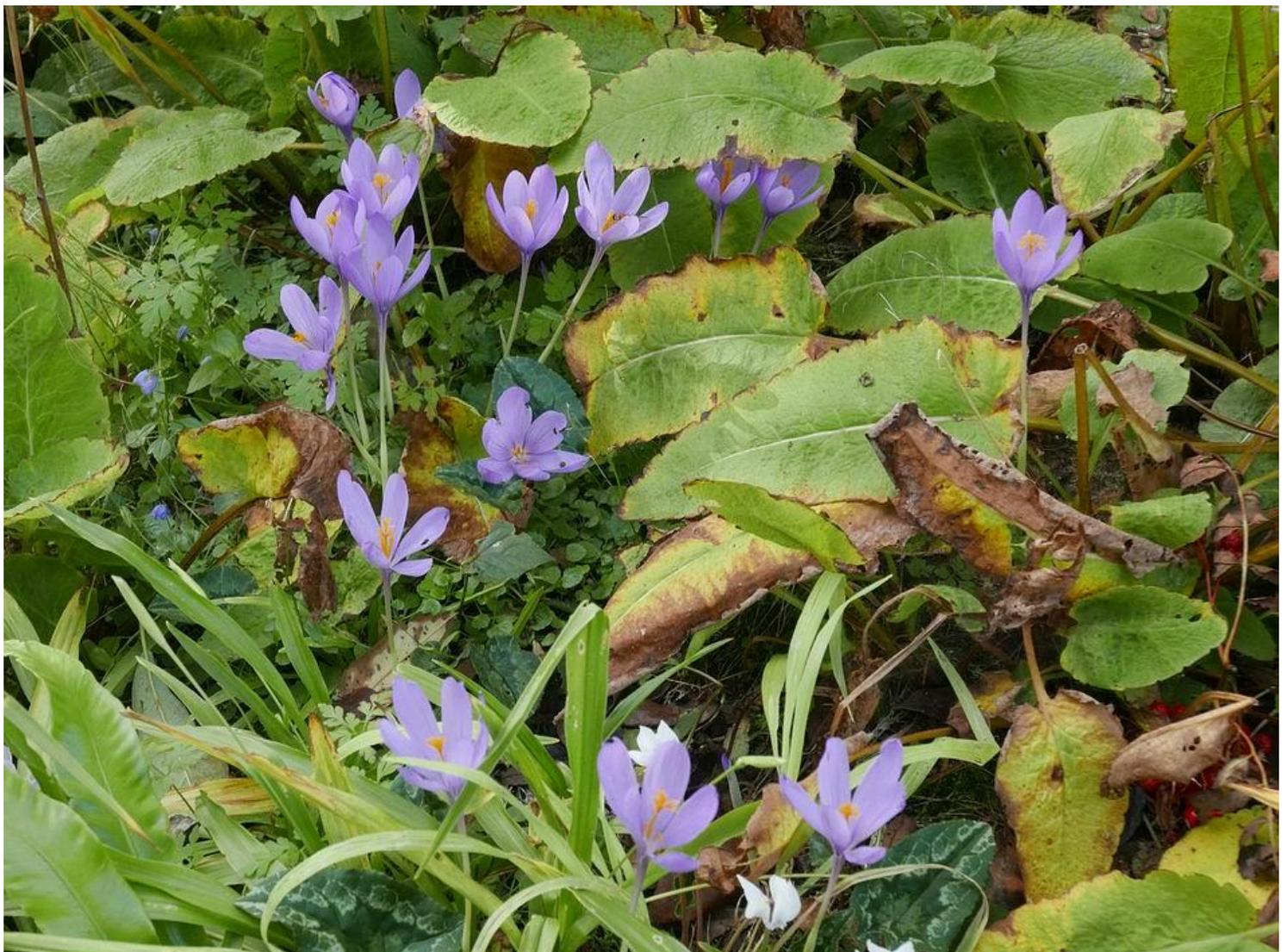


Crocus nudiflorus growing happily around the base of the *Meconopsis* which are starting to retreat for the winter.



With their tall, delicate, floral tube **Crocus nudiflorus** are well adapted to growing through other plants, the foliage of which provides them with support and protection.

The spring flowering bulbs such as Crocus, Erythronium, Narcissus, Scilla, etc. are among the many other plants that occupy this bed all taking their turn to come into the light and flower.



Crocus nudiflorus



Every day the scene changes with different sequences of Crocus flowers coming and going.





Although I am focusing on the Crocus, groups of *Colchicum* flowers also bring colour to the Autumn garden.



Colchicum and *Roscoea* flowering through the collapsing *Dicentra* foliage.



Colchicum flowers catch the light bringing colour into the back of this shaded bed.



For a number of years I have been establishing a colony of *Trillium rivale* below the pine at this end of the raised bed allowing them to seed down from the top to grow between the rocks of the wall but they are not alone.



Crocus nudiflorus was not part of my plan but nature, our gardening tutor and partner, showed the way.



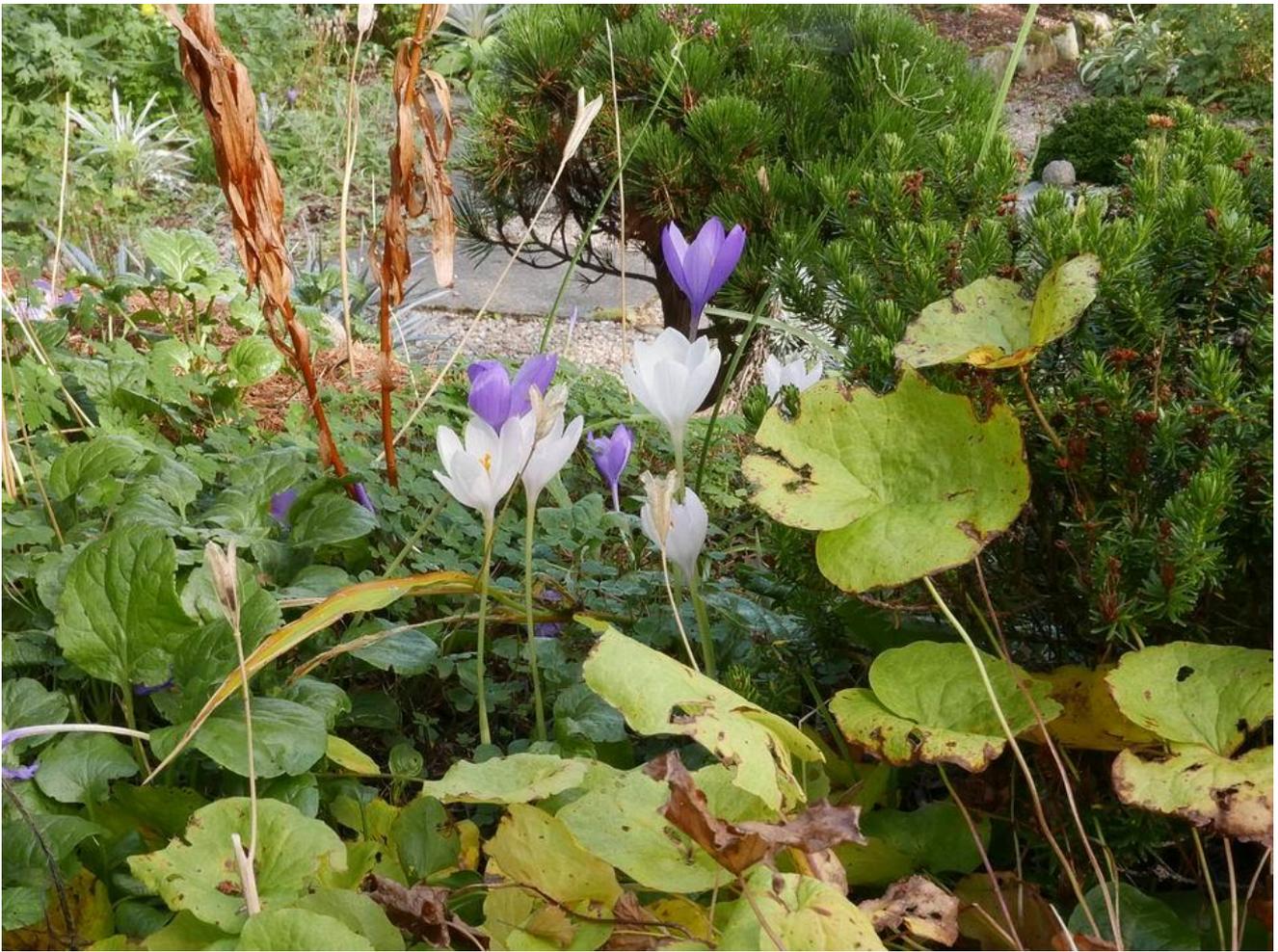
Crocus nudiflorus got into this bed when I scattered some old potting compost which must have contained some seed and small stolons - now a nice colony is establishing both on the top and between the rocks .



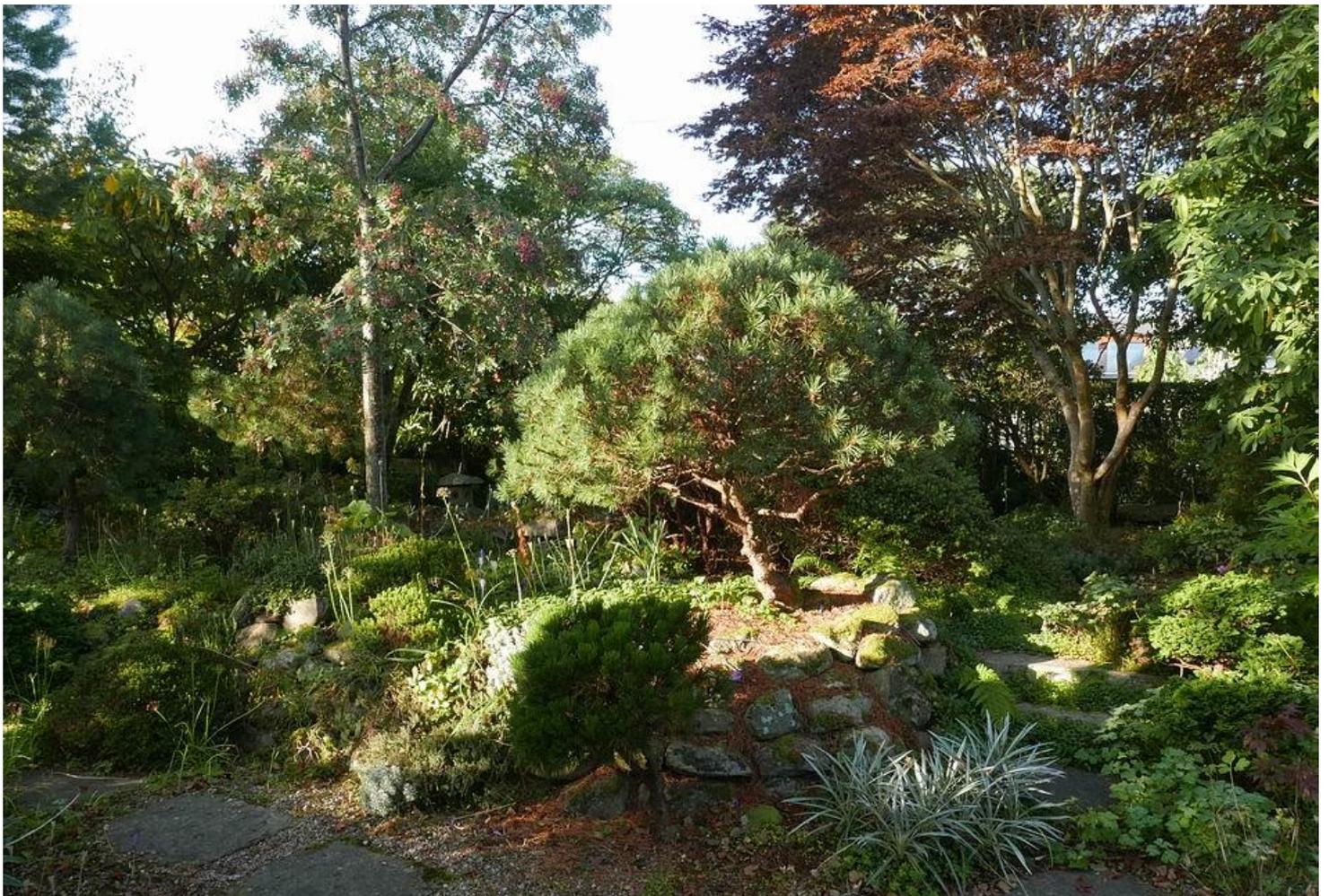
The **Crocus nudiflorus** flowers continue to open and close even though the tubes have been bent over by a night of heavy rain and wind.



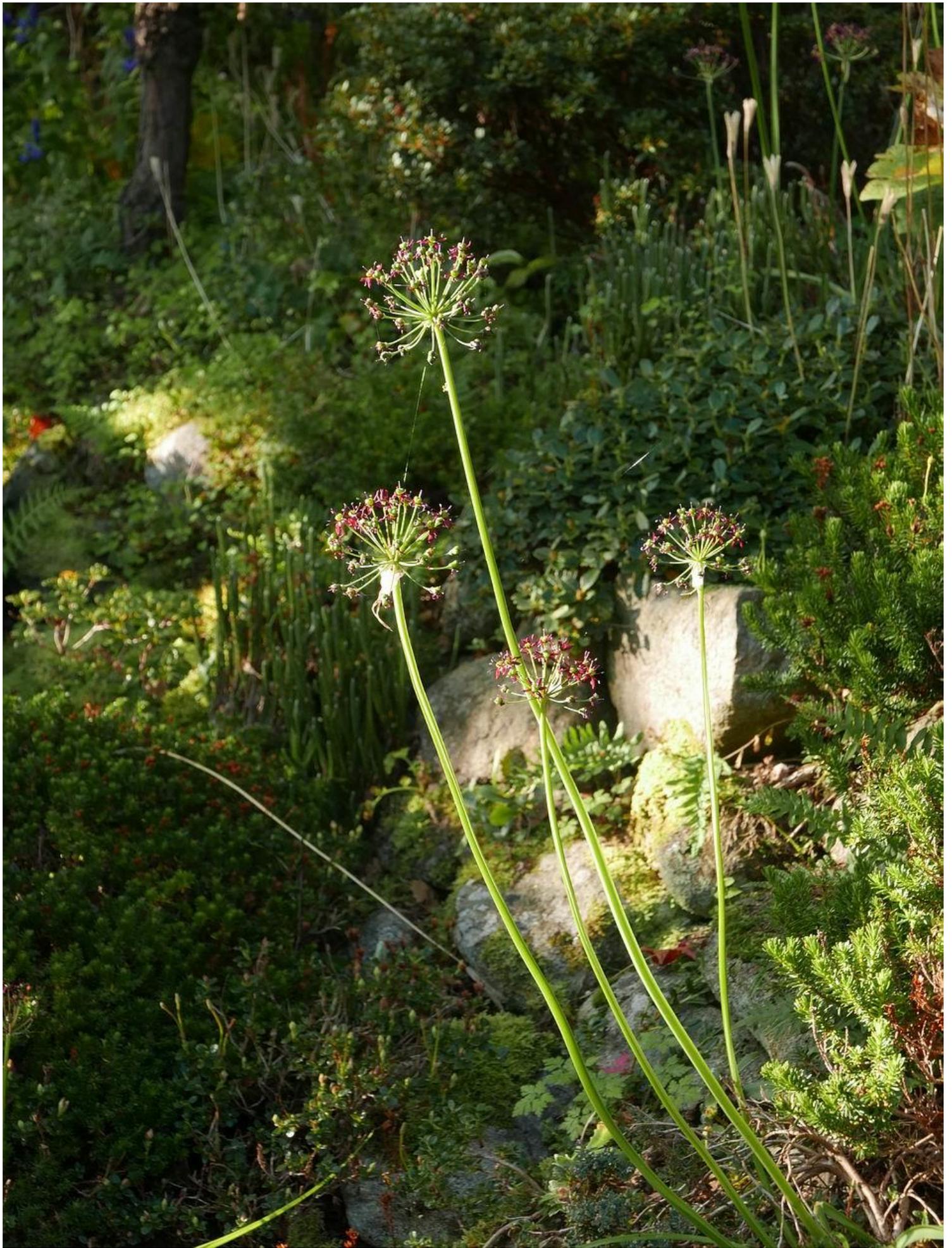
Different colour forms of **Crocus nudiflorus** add colour as the leaves of other plants are dying back for the winter.



Crocus nudiflorus flowering through the evergreen foliage of *Pyrola media* while the Jeffersonia leaves die back.



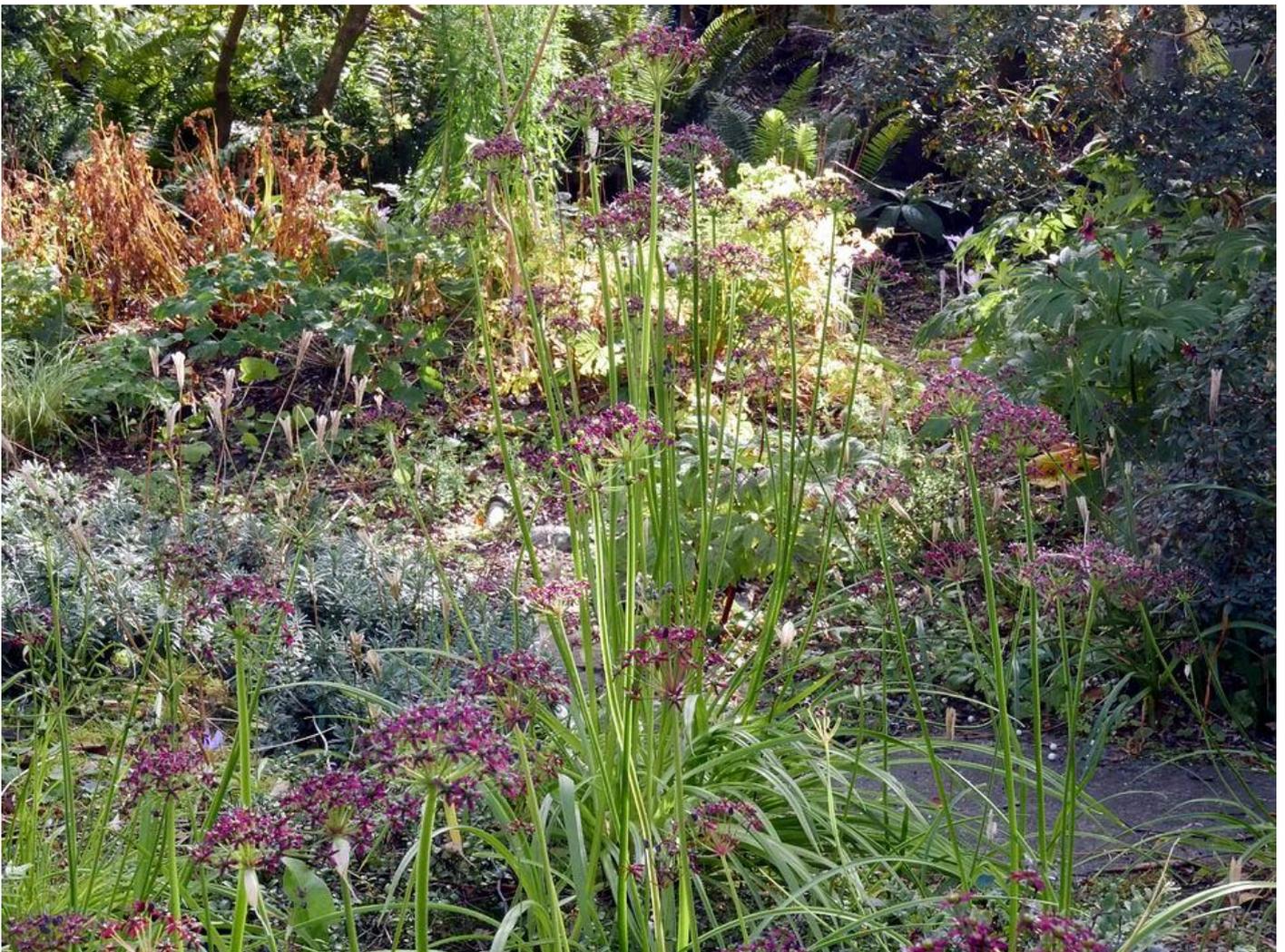
In addition to the strong contrast between light and shade the low sun adds dramatic effects spotlighting certain plants in turn.



Nature also planted **Allium wallichii** on top of the wall and between the rocks, as this example picked out in the low sun shows. The colony we have all share the same clusters of small dark flowers which are easy to miss until they are illuminated by a sunbeam, when they jump out from the background, glowing as if switching on a light.



On the left are some **Allium wallichii** flowers catching the light and below is an expanding self seeding colony growing in perfect harmony in the very same gravel areas where we have colonies of Erythronium flowering in the spring.



Allium wallichii



**Crocus
vallicola**

We have grown *Crocus vallicola* for many years, increasing it every year by collecting and sowing the seed into pots kept in an outside frame which is mostly left open to the weather.



When I was young a wise friend told me that gardeners need two lifetimes - one to learn and one to do – at the time I did not fully appreciate what he meant, now I do!

For years we grew many plants in pots that now I would plant directly in the garden – we did that because they were rare and precious and we wanted to protect them but as we increased their numbers getting ever more seed each year we felt emboldened to try planting some directly into the garden where they thrived.



Crocus vallicola



How much better *Crocus vallicola* looks released from a pot and growing in this more natural looking habitat where it is left to seed itself and increase – I can now look back and wish we had realised more plants sooner.



Each year the seasons come round but no two are exactly the same – most years the *Uvularia* foliage overgrowing these *Cyclamen hederifolium* would have died back but due to the cool moist summer it has kept growing.



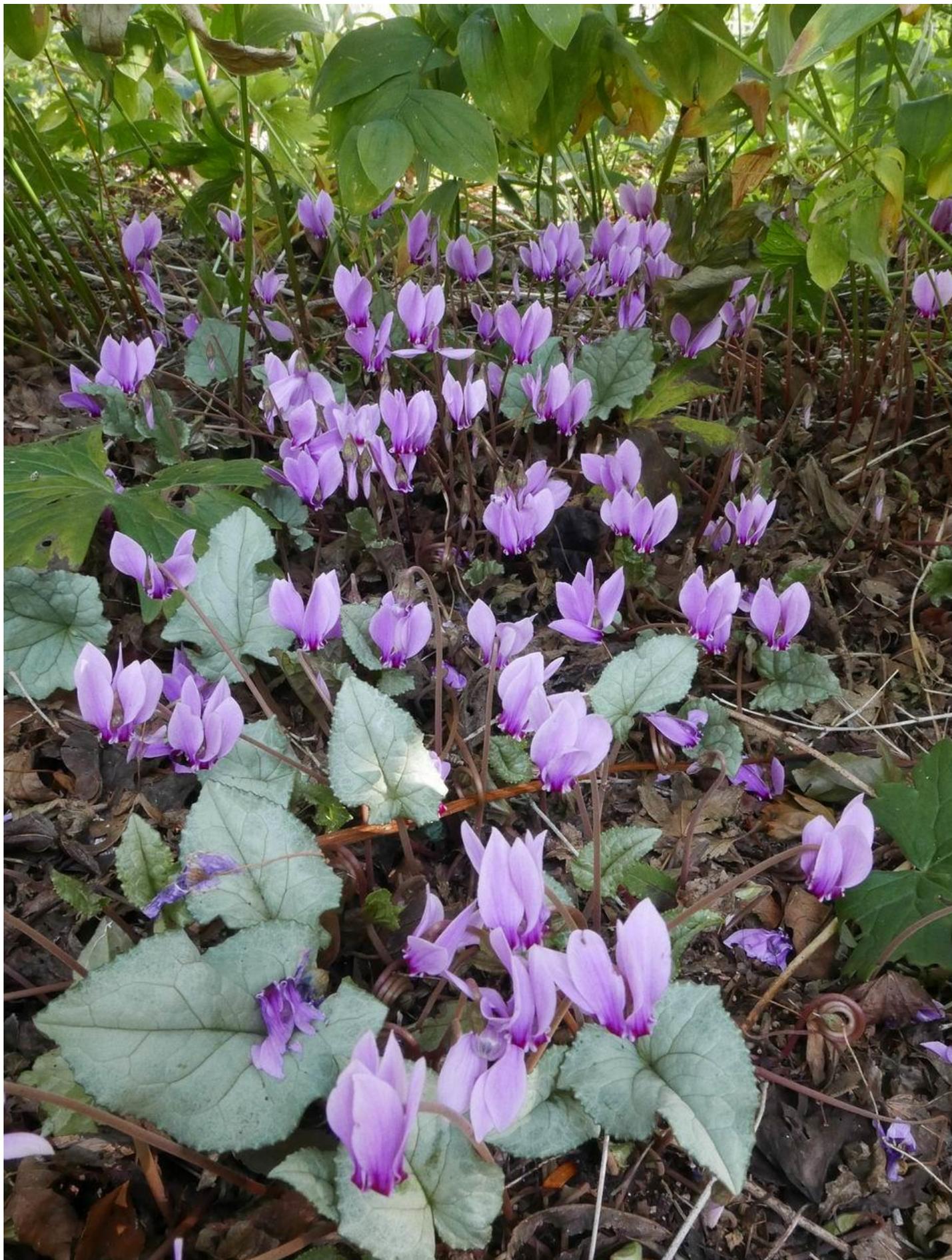
I am usually able to cut back the yellowing *Uvularia grandiflora* foliage as the *Cyclamen* starts to flower but this year the seed pods were still green and the plants were not yet ready to retreat.



After a few weeks of warm drier conditions the *Uvularia grandiflora* is now ready to release its ripe seeds.



***Uvularia grandiflora* seed**



Cyclamen hederifolium

We all like the challenge of acquiring and growing rare or unusual plants but that should never be at the expense of appreciating and growing the more widely available plants that will naturalise, becoming the back bone of your garden. The bulbs I have featured here, perhaps with the exception of *Crocus vallicola*, are all readily available. I also feature the *Crocus* in my most recent [Bulb Log Video Diary Supplement](#) just click the link to join me.....